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This bulletin, concerned with guidance for the underachiever with superior ability, was designed to provide useful suggestions and resource material for guidance programs at all educational levels. It indicates that relatively little research has been reported on the nature or prevalence of the college underachiever with superior ability and that still less is known about specific ways in which such students can be helped to achieve to a degree commensurate with their high intellectual abilities. States that a number of studies have shown that among those dropping out because of failing grades are many underachievers with superior ability and that it has been estimated that between 20 and 35 percent of college students with superior ability can be classified as underachievers. Stresses the importance for each institution to conduct research on the problem.

Each chapter concludes with numerous resource references.

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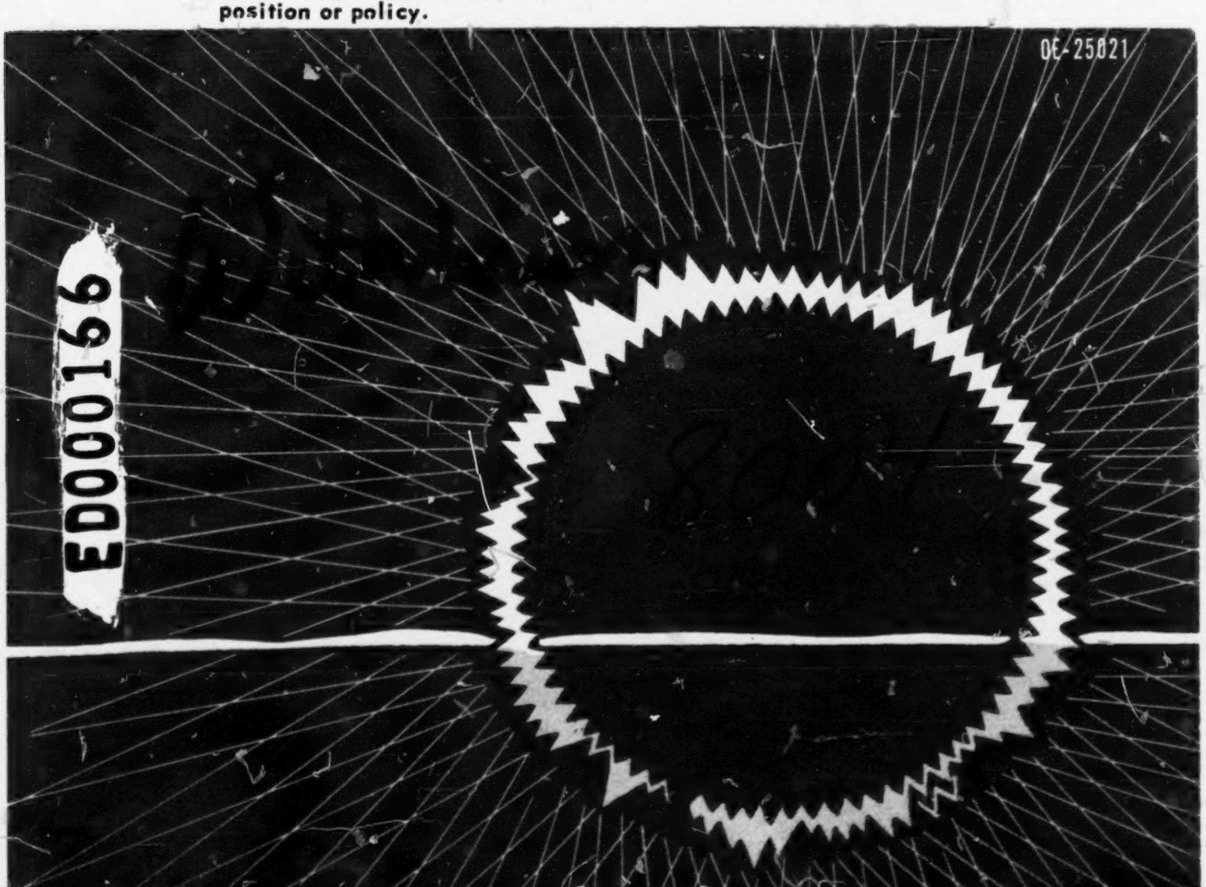

Guidance for the Underachiever with Superior Ability

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Bulletin 1961, No. 25

Guidance for the Underachiever with Superior Ability

Edited by
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Counseling Techniques

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
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Foreword

WITHIN the past 5 years, the identification and education of the gifted and the talented student have received unprecedented emphasis in American education. This new impetus can be traced to a number of programs and reports. Prominent among them are: The cooperative program for students of exceptional talent in Portland, Oregon, supported in part by the Fund for the Advancement of Education; projects and reports related to the guidance, identification, and education of the Academically Talented Student in Elementary and Secondary Schools, sponsored by the National Education Association and made possible by funds from the Carnegie Corporation of New York; the books by Dr. James B. Conant, entitled *The American High School Today* and *The Development of Talent in Europe and the United States;* the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools Project on Guidance and Motivation of Superior and Talented Students, supported by grants from the Carnegie Corporation of New York; the Rockefeller Brothers Fund report on the *Pursuit of Excellence;* the Talented Youth Project of the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute, School of Experimentation, Teachers College; the Talent Preservation Project of New York City; the Educational Policies Commission publication *Manpower and Education;* the National Defense Education Act of 1958; and others.

The reports and publications on these projects appearing in 1959, 1960, and early 1961 placed considerable emphasis upon the guidance function in education and the need for strong ongoing guidance programs for the entire school population. Some stressed the guidance needs of the underachiever but seemed to be concerned mostly with psychological and educational factors involved in underachievement without giving much attention to guidance and counseling services to the underachievers among the academically talented. Though some of these reports showed evidences of guidance programs for the underachiever, very few had well-defined, comprehensive programs identified according to problems presented by the underachiever at the various grade levels. There was a need to synthesize what was being done in our public schools and colleges and to provide suggestions on how to organize guidance and counseling services to meet the needs of the underachiever with superior ability. As a result, a conference was called by the Office of Education on June 23–25, 1960, in Washington, D.C., to plan the contents of a bulletin on guidance for the underachieving talented child.

The participants in the conference made a careful review of guidance problems peculiar to the underachiever and the nature of research and demonstrations which have been conducted in this area. They studied the questions pertaining to guidance services for the underachiever which were being asked by educators, guidance personnel, parents, and community leaders. They concluded that the bulletin should be directed toward guidance for the underachiever with superior ability and that the content should be of a practical nature to show what was currently being done to provide guidance and counseling services for the underachiever at all grade levels.

This publication contains suggestions on how the guidance needs and problems of the underachiever can be identified and defines ways in which these needs can be met at the various educational levels.

E. GLENN FEATHERSTON,
Assistant Commissioner and
Director, Division of State
and Local School Systems

JOHN R. LUDINGTON,
Director, Aid to State and
Local Schools Branch

Acknowledgments

THE PUBLICATION of this bulletin has been made possible through the combined efforts of a number of individuals. Some of them had supervised clinical, diagnostic, and remedial services for underachieving high school students with superior ability who were facing rather acute emotional, health, sociological, and psychological problems. Some had directed guidance programs in which special attention was given to the needs of the underachiever. Several had conducted research and demonstration projects and had written books and articles on various phases of the problems of underachievement.

The conferees were: *Charles E. Bish*, director, National Education Association, Project on the Academically Gifted, Washington, D.C.; *Willis E. Dugan*, professor of educational psychology, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; *Riley R. Eddleman*, director of guidance services, School District of Hazelwood, St. Louis, Mo.; *Warren G. Findley*, assistant superintendent, Pupil Personnel Services, Board of Education, Atlanta, Ga.; *Joseph L. French*, assistant professor, University of Missouri, Columbia; *Irene H. Impellizzeri*, research coordinator, and *Harry Joseph*, M.D., psychiatric director, Talent Preservation Project, Bureau of Educational and Vocational Guidance, Board of Education of City of New York; *Anna R. Meeks*, supervisor of guidance, Baltimore County Board of Education, Towson, Md.; *Frances Noll*, counselor, LaSalle Elementary School, Washington, D.C.; *Merle M. Ohlsen*, professor of education, University of Illinois, Urbana; *James V. Pierce*, assistant director, Quincy Youth Development Project, Quincy, Ill.; *Merville C. Shaw, II*, associate professor of psychology, Chico State College, Chico, Calif.; *Lance Shreffler*, counselor, Upper Arlington High School, Columbus, Ohio; *Helen G. Stern*, counselor-coordinator, Nyack High School, Nyack, N.Y.; *Robert O. Stripling*, professor of education, University of Florida, Gainesville.

When these conferees met in Washington, D.C., June 23–25, 1960, most of them brought with them pertinent materials and findings of research, demonstration projects, or ongoing guidance and counseling programs. Much of this material was used as the basis for determining the nature and contents of the bulletin.

A special word of appreciation is due Warren G. Findley, who kept the conference moving toward well-defined goals in his role as chairman of the Steering Committee.

This was a truly cooperative undertaking. All conferees gave time to reviewing the manuscript and making editorial suggestions which are reflected in this final copy. Several conferees devoted considerable time to reviewing certain sections of the bulletin. Our special gratitude is due Merville C. Shaw, who made a critical review of the six chapters of the bulletin with respect to style and uniformity of content.

The development of the early stages of the project and the final editing was the work of Leonard M. Miller. We are indebted to many other Office of Education staff members who assisted in the planning session and in a critical review of certain sections of the bulletin.

FRANK L. SIEVERS,
Chief, Guidance, Counseling, and
Testing Section, Aid to State and
Local Schools Branch

CHAPTER 1

Nature and Scope of the Problem

Irene H. Impellizzeri

DURING the 1930's a great educational effort was made to wipe out illiteracy and to bring public education to even the poorest and most remote districts of America. In the later 1940's special attention was given to the retarded and the disturbed children. During the 1950's teachers, administrators, and theoreticians of American education, while continuing their effort to extend education to masses of children who might be denied it by economic and social circumstance or who had once been considered uneducable, concentrated on a new effort to intensify education for all children. Presently, increasing attention is being given to boys and girls who have the ability to go on to college or to profit from other types of post-high-school education.

This reexamination of the fate of the talented student is partly due to economics and technology which have made brains one of America's most important resources. More and more unskilled and semiskilled work is being done by machines. Obviously, progress depends on intelligences who can direct and create physical and social complexes far beyond what an educated man of a hundred years ago could even have understood.

Need To Encourage the Students of Superior Ability

In only 8 years, between 1950 and 1958, the number of people in occupations that could be described as "professional" increased by 46 percent (Wood, 1959.) By 1975 we will probably need the services of twice as many engineers and scientists, for example, as we had in 1958. To supply these educated people, teachers, the largest professional group in the country, will have to increase in number. More students will require more teachers, and more difficult subjects will require better teacher preparation.

Nevertheless, there is no clear reason to fear that we cannot meet the demand for educated personnel. The Bureau of Labor Statistics anticipates that "personnel supply and demand will be approximately in balance in professional and related occupations as a group over the 1960 decade as a whole." (Wood, 1959, p. 3.) The shortage we face is of a special kind. We will continue to suffer from an endemic shortage of really first-rate minds in all the learned occupations. There may be enough people with college and professional degrees to sit at every desk, but will these persons have a real capacity to contribute and to lead?

Wasted Talent

We cannot afford to waste potential talent. Yet, of the high school students who rank in the top third in intellectual ability, 40 percent do not enter college. (Wolfle, 1960.) Of those who do enter, 60 percent do not finish college. Either we are unrealistic about our students or we are wasting them. Either our conventional measures of intellectual ability are poor or achievement in high school and college depends on something besides intellectual ability. Until we know what is wrong and what to do about it, we may very well be discarding the most creative minds of the rising generation and squandering a resource already scarce.

That is why, as special school programs for the "gifted child" have become more common, a particular interest has begun to develop in one group of the gifted or potentially gifted. These are the students whose school performance is significantly below their high aptitudes or their potentials, as measured by conventional measuring instruments or as sensed by teachers who can "feel" the presence of unusual creativity or cognitive powers. This group of underachievers has taken a central place in the attention of educators. First, this group challenges the presumptions on which most schools base their programs for the academically talented. Second, its problems may correspond to major causes of attrition among seemingly able students.

Most gifted children, like others, do not do as much or as well as they could. It is very hard to know at what point this falling short ceases to be merely human and becomes a problem. It is therefore hard to attach numbers to the problem. The conference on the Identification of the Academically Talented Student in Secondary Schools, February 1958, reports that "15 to 25 percent of the gifted students in most school systems fall into this category [of underachievers], and in some schools the incidence is even higher." (National Education Association, 1958.) In one California high school where 7 percent of the students were regarded as gifted, 42 percent of these were regarded as "underachievers" that is, students falling below the top third in scholastic rank. (Gowan, 1955.) A study of 4,900 "bright" high school students recently conducted in New York City (the Talent Preservation Project) reports that 54 percent of the boys and 33 percent of the girls had scholastic averages which, halfway through high school, were already so low that their admission to college was in doubt. These students represented the high-ability populations of their classes in 39 academic high schools; and of the 4,900 only 20 percent were able to complete the first 3 terms of senior high school without faltering at some point and getting grades below 85. (New York City Board of Education, 1959a.) Obviously, the percentages reported by these studies are not what is significant; what is important is that they all support the impressions of teachers that, for one reason or another, a large proportion of capable students are not doing work commensurate with their capacities. It is indeed useful, in formulating social policy, to know the precise dimensions of the problem. But in our society, the state is for man, not man for the state; and so the loss to society of skilled services is less important than the fact that underachievers are ineffectual—or at least they are not enjoying the constructive lives of which they are capable. The important moral fact is not the social cost of the problem but the fact that there is a problem at all.

Fulfillment of the Individual

It is hard to make scientific statements about happiness and unhappiness. They are states of being that cannot be precisely defined or accurately measured. But they must be dealt with somehow. If research were to deal only with what can be precisely defined and accurately measured, it would be difficult to see how educational research could deal with anything really germane to education. Putting aside the question of what true happiness is, or what the proper fulfillment of an individual is, psychologists agree in general that psychological health means that: (1) human powers have been harmoniously and fully developed according to their true position within the hierarchy of all of man's powers; and (2) they are integrated in the freely willed service of a worthy end—worthy from the point of view both of the person performing the service and of society. Maslow, in one of the few systematic studies of people who are "mature and psychologically healthy," writes that these are persons who have retained and developed all their human capacities, especially those capacities which distinguish them from the nonreasoning animal. He observed "cases in which it seemed clear . . . that the pathology [boredom, loss of zest in life, self-dislike, general depression of the bodily functions, steady deterioration of the intellectual life, of tastes, etc.] was produced in intelligent people leading stupid lives in stupid jobs." (Maslow, 1954, p. 95.)

Among the most mysterious of all the functions of man are those with which the schools have traditionally been primarily concerned—the cognitive powers. And the frustration of the cognitive powers is closely related to psychological ill health. Clinicians like Maslow say that "probably there are true psychopathological effects when the cognitive needs are frustrated." (1954, p. 95.) Reciprocally, emotional ill health may frustrate the cognitive powers. The dysfunction of school abilities may thus be simultaneously a result and a cause of extrascholastic disturbance.

Terman's longitudinal study of more than 1,000 persons of genius and near-genius has established an image of the student of high abilities as a happier and healthier person than his fellows. This image has been criticized as begging the question: it is argued that by selecting a sample primarily from these who had demonstrated the capacity for success (by their high Binet IQ scores) Terman eliminated most of those whose abilities were inhibited by poor emotional or physical health.

But Terman and Oden (1947) also studied 150 of the most successful and 150 of the least successful within this group of gifted persons. He found a consistently positive correlation between success and such variables as mental health, emotional stability, and social adjustment. What he does establish is the close association of psychological health with well-manifested and well-functioning cognitive powers.

Within the New York City Talent Preservation Project, a special inquiry was made into the psychological health of 315 gifted or potentially gifted adolescents—255 low achievers and 60 high achievers. Early results indicate that emotional turbulence may underlie many learning disorders. Interviews by a psychiatrist yielded no single factor to account for poor achievement, of course, but problems did seem to fall into four groups:

1. For approximately 30 percent, the learning disorder is associated with poor motivation and poor conditioning, not with any serious psychopathology.
2. For 10 percent, the learning disorder is associated with acute situational reactions such as illness, problems with teachers and difficulties during only one examination period.
3. Fifty percent of the non-achievers show evidence of relatively serious chronic neurotic problems with which learning disorder is associated.
4. Ten percent show urgent need for immediate treatment, without which

> serious danger to the health and welfare of the students is present. In this category are included students with problems of depression, promiscuity and delinquent behavior.
>
> 5. There have been no cases of overt psychosis. (New York City Board of Education, 1959b.)

For those cases in which emotional imbalance is associated with underachievement, it may seem that this emotional disturbance is the cause of underachievement. For example, the inability to organize one's family life, social life, and sexual life may seem to prevent one from organizing one's thoughts. But the disorientation may also go in the other direction, especially when, as is necessarily the case in an adolescent going to school, one's relations with one's family and friends are so strongly influenced by the insistent demands of a big impersonal institution. Frequently, it may happen that a student who is afflicted with a worry at home which he could ordinarily handle, falters in his school work, finds his family difficulties exacerbated, is trapped in self-distrust, and flounders badly.

On the other hand, we must not suppose that emotional perturbation always blocks study. Neurotic anxieties can also drive a person to achieve at all costs. Turbulence may be found in the highest achievers. The New York City investigation reported that serious emotional problems appeared in 30 percent of the cases in the high-achiever group. Why do some students react by working to the limit of their capacity and a little beyond? No simple explanation has been discovered and perhaps none will be. But the New York study suggests that the answers are usually to be sought in the domain of "personality pattern" or "life style:"

> . . . All the achievers show one significant common denominator, outstanding ego strength. They are able to relate excellently to reality problems, which they resolve most effectively. Parenthetically, they appear to be the leaders not only scholastically but also socially. (New York City Board of Education, 1959b.)

This conclusion suggests the importance of scholastic achievement to a child trying to cope with the problems of adolescence. It also suggests much more, for there can be little doubt that a "life style" is best understood by inquiring into experiences of childhood. Early psychologists taught that the foundations of character are established by the age of three, and that while later events may modify the traits then formed, basically they can never expunge them. (Allport, 1960.)

Societal Influences

Several variables other than emotional health that seem to affect the quality of scholastic performance—study habits, interest in academic subjects, regularity of school attendance, personal standards of perfection—have been found to be related to very early training, both in the home and at school. The modern school thus finds itself in a difficult situation. It has the duty, agreed on by all educators, of developing to the fullest its students' intellectual and volitional powers. Yet the carrying out of this duty is seen to depend in large measure upon factors outside the jurisdiction of the school and in many cases antedating the school's contact with the student.

For example, one wishes that more influences in contemporary society encouraged high personal standards of perfection. Obviously, unrealistically high personal standards of perfection may be a symptom of neurosis, but short of the extreme, there is a kind of association of oneself with one's obligations which is a sign of good psychological health. Yet "there is little incentive to youth of high ability who finds mediocrity handsomely rewarded in so many walks of life." (Cole, 1956, p. 31.) A culture that adores financial status, physical beauty, second-rate professional entertainment, and the accumulation of material things creates an alien world for the brilliant student. The student must frequently choose between what can be quickly obtained and what can only be attained by long submission to educational routines. And when what is so difficult to attain is so little applauded, the choice may be a cruel one to make.

It is easy enough to make society at large the scapegoat for all educational difficulties, including the shortcomings of the schools themselves. But when it comes to criticizing specific social institutions, a more scientific discretion has to be observed. The family is manifestly the strongest agent in transmitting a society's set of values and its cultural heritage to a child. Several investigators have studied the relation between achievement in school and parental influence. They have observed certain characteristics of a home which encourage good work in school: the simple expectation of high achievement, the valuing of learning for its own sake, the presence of "models" of scholarship. "Children in a cultured home are more likely than others to develop a taste for music, art, and books, and are more likely to want to go to college. Such children are not necessarily superior in ability, but they are more likely to develop whatever abilities they have. . . . The high school youth who develops a strong desire for attending college in the face of the opposition or apathy of his parents is the exception rather than the rule." (National Education Association, 1950, p. 26.)

Berdie (1954), comparing the parents of students planning to go to college with the parents of those not planning to go, discovered that while both groups of parents recognized the financial rewards of a college education, the parents of the college-bound youngsters had emphasized a love of learning and the values of higher education in the personal development of their children, while the other parents as a group had not done this.

Children learn their values early. One study of 45 superior students from homes with strong intellectual orientation showed that high achievers had accepted adult values as early as grade 3. (Haggard, 1957.)

Yet there are a disturbing number of failures and rebellions among children from homes that seem to promote intellectual excellence. These children sometimes understand the values of their parents very clearly but somehow do not make them their own values. It is hard to say why this is so, and why offspring even within the same family react differently to the family's expressed values. Presumably personal interactions that lie deeper than the expressed values account for much of this uncertainty. But it may also be that family prestige, social mobility, financial reward, and unsatisfied parental ambition may, to very bright and perceptive children, look like unworthy motives and may provoke effective and powerful rebellion.

In practice, the schools themselves have sometimes helped to distort in the child's mind the goals of education. An entire school system can sometimes forget its objectives. This can produce a crass or indifferent tone; it can produce poor morale that the student sees in the form of unchallenging teaching methods, lack of guidance, poorly prepared or unqualified teachers, and inadequate supervision. In the face of these things, the bright student is likely to become cynical—the brighter and more idealistic the student is, the more disturbing is the contrast between the implied ethic or scientific and humanistic learning on the one hand, and the palpable atmosphere of the school on the other. In a small way, this subtle debasing of the ideals of education may be found in many classrooms: well-intentioned and zealous teachers, simply because they do mean well, are likely to try to "motivate" their students by calling up glossy images of wordly success as the rewards of education. Many teachers are themselves economically harassed, many more are disturbed by what they feel to be the low status of their profession in a society that often seems to value gadgets, nonintellectual pleasures, and bank accounts more than it values the things of the spirit. They are therefore tempted to prove to their students that the things of the spirit are valuable in material terms. In particular, they stress the economic value of advanced education, because they fear that students with high potential will not go on to college otherwise. Thus, though they may, by this means, persuade some students to go to college (and, unhappily, discourage others), they may simultaneously spoil the meaning of college for those students.

It would be too much to expect that the young gifted child would be fortified in his intellectual interests and encouraged to use his mind in a deep or significant way by most of his age-mates or friends. Groups are not the natural habitat of the intellect. The bright student has the same need for social acceptance as the less bright, and it is the duller child who often sets the tone of the group simply because the dull *cannot* conform to the standards of the bright, while the bright *can* conform to the dull and may find it relaxing to do so. This is not a new problem. It has probably always been characteristic of students. G. K. Chesterton, for instance, records his experiences of English school life in the late Victorian Age:

> The idea that I had come to school to work was too grotesque to cloud my mind for an instant. It was also in too obvious a contrast with the facts and the results . . . To one very distinguished individual, my own personal debt is infinite; I mean the historian . . . Mr. T. Rice Holmes. He managed, heaven knows how, to penetrate through my deep and desperately consolidated desire to appear stupid; and discover the horrible secret that I was, after all, endowed with the gift of reason above the brute. He would suddenly ask me a question a thousand miles away from the subject in hand, and surprise me into admitting that I had heard of the Song of Roland, or even read a play or two of Shakespeare. Nobody who knows anything of the English schoolboy at that date will imagine that there was at the moment any pleasure in such prominence or distinction. We were all hag-ridden with a horror of showing off, which was perhaps the only coherent moral principle we possessed. (Chesterton, 1936, p. 64.)

Barr (1959) recording some subjective impressions of the dynamics of underachievement based on his contrasted experiences in the Talent Preservation Project (studying underachievers) and the Columbia Science Honor Program (working with high achievers) reports:

> A hundred years ago, or even fifty years ago, there was one culture in the classroom. It was the culture of the intellectually engaged and ambitious student, the bright student. The non-so-bright student imitated the bright as best he could, and if he could not reproduce in some simplified or attenuated form the culture of the bright, he failed. Naturally he did not like the feeling of failure, and assuaged his hurt by scoffing or by little retributive social pressures. But he had no other culture by the standards of which he could claim success. Now, however, there has grown up, not only in America, but in Europe, a Second Culture. This Second Culture is a culture in the full sense. It has its own language with a distinctive vocabulary, pronunciation and syntax; it has its own

> sumptuary code; it has its own social rituals; it has its own mythology and heroes; it has its own Bacchic rites. In this culture, success is not related to intellectual attainment—almost the reverse. So in some schools the teacher confronts two classes at once, a minority of bright committed students of the traditional type, and a disengaged or even sullen group who derive all their feelings of success and validation from activities unconnected with what he, the teacher, is doing. Worse, in some schools there is an incessant seduction of the traditionally bright into the Second Culture because of the social and sexual opportunities it may afford.

While Barr's description is perhaps excessively dichotomous, it does point to one of the important anti-intellectual tendencies in the contemporary peer-group situation.

Yet another factor in a young person's decision, or decisions, concerning his life, is economic necessity. Research has shown a positive relationship between school grades and the occupational level of the student's father. And there is a strong relationship between socioeconomic status and college attendance; college, of course, casts its shadow before in the form of much aspiration-related behavior throughout high school. In Havighurst's (1960) typical community, it will be noted that within the top quarter (high school rank or test) of the boys graduating from high school, *all* boys from the middle class or above go to college. But one-fifth of the boys in the top quarter do not go to college, and that fifth comes from the working class. Findings of Cole (1956), Terman and Oden (1947), Wolfle (1954), Hollingshead (1952), and others support this social model in which, IQ for IQ and class standing for class standing, children of professional and highly educated parents are far more likely to attend college and to show beforehand the corresponding attitudes.

A study of two groups of children, one from relatively favorable homes and the other from clearly unfavorable circumstances, shows the average achievement of children from the less favorable environment was 6 months below their potential ability, whereas the children from the more favorable environment were less than a month below adjudged potential. Besides the pattern of aspirations, there are obviously objective patterns that can produce this result. These homes differ greatly in the opportunity for privacy, in the number and quality of books and magazines, and in the encouragement of school attendance. These factors were, of course, found to be far less favorable in the homes of the academically less successful pupils. (Findley, 1960.) There is a correlation between socioeconomic status and ultimate scholastic success, but the sense of most research in the field is that socioeconomic factors do not by themselves differentiate between achievers and underachievers; they are part of a varying pattern of variables.

Usually related to socioeconomic status, but often in practice quite distinct from it, is cultural level—using culture now in its narrow sense of the amenities of the mind and spirit. Not every impoverished home is illiterate; but many homes displaying immense quantities of money and technology are totally barren of books or at least books that have been read. Cultural deprivation, not only depresses school performance, but actually confounds the problem by interfering with the very measures used to discover the child of superior ability. Findley (1959) writes:

> . . . as the individual grows into adolescence, the advantages and limitations of environmental origin become so built in as to be difficult to overcome or modify. It is nevertheless true that at every stage of development the accepted index of potential learning ability tends to underpredict the achievement of those from deprived socio-economic backgrounds. Several studies show that college achievement of high school graduates tends to exceed that of private school graduates of equal scholastic aptitude. Motivational factors may be assumed to play a part, but we can also trace an effect of difference in environmental factors. Thus, a particular aptitude score in the group less favored by home surroundings, intensive instruction, and motivation by classmates of high ability, with similar academic goals, reflects an accomplishment greater than that of one more favored, which augurs greater success for the environmentally less favored when environment is made constant by living and studying on the same campus.

At present, there is no instrument by which to discover the true incidence of intellectually superior individuals among the culturally deprived. Bond believes "that potentially high intellectual ability is not rare, nor to be found in a select and limited group of human beings . . . there is an enormous reservoir of high potential abilities in our population . . . that goes to waste." (Bond, 1960, p. 119.) His preliminary findings in a current study of American Negroes with doctorates show that the county with the highest incidence of manifest talent was favored by the circumstances of a first-class school, even for plantation ex-slaves. He concludes that, if every child in the country, of every depressed racial group, of every low socioeconomic group, and of every culturally deprived group, had the same opportunities enjoyed by the children of the upper levels of occupation, we would be able to increase our talent fivefold. In any case, it seems clear that acute cultural deprivation, especially when accompanied by acute socioeconomic deprivation, can alter or reduce the responsiveness of some minds to the point where, by the time that tests of academic ability are administered, there is not much operable ability left.

Whether counteracting cultural deprivation will counteract the effects of cultural deprivation is an open question. There are a few studies that report statistically the effects of saturating a culturally deprived group with school personnel, extra teaching aids, improved classroom circumstances including small classes, intensive guidance, and tutorial services. One effort in this direction is the Demonstration Guidance Project in New York City, which has already recorded appreciable gains despite the fact that it has been in effect for only 3 of its 6 planned years. By means of a generous allocation of funds and administrative talent, culturally deprived children were lifted to better levels of aspiration and response; and the success was marked enough so that the New York City Board of Education extended the program into 13 junior high schools and 51 elementary schools in underprivileged areas of the city. (Krugman and Impellizzeri, 1960.)

Achievement Differential of the Sexes

Though it is clear that emotional, ethical, peer-group, socioeconomic, and cultural factors all have their influence on school achievement, there must be other factors to account for the achievement differential of the two sexes. Almost every study shows that more boys than girls are underachievers in secondary school. An earlier study by Gowan (1955) and a later one conducted in New York City (New York City Board of Education, 1959a) agree that among intellectually superior high school students, the underachieving boys outnumber the underachieving girls by 2 to 1. While leaving school before graduation and underachievement are not synonymous, possibly the same values tend to produce the sex differential in both. Even among the population as a whole, a smaller proportion of boys than girls graduate from high school. Interestingly, this proportion is in part reversed at the college level when the initial dropouts and underachievers have been eliminated. The National Science Foundation reports that within the top 30 percent of the population 45 percent of the men and 30 percent of the women graduate from college. (Wolfle, 1960.) Terman and Oden's (1947) classic study not only confirms that a higher proportion of able boys than girls attend college, but suggests that the men obtain higher college grades than do the women.

One explanation of the initial male repudiation of academic excellence is that our society expects boys to assert their independence and girls to conform to certain limitation of decorum and tractability. As Pierce (1960) hypothesizes, a boy derives a sense of achievement from many things—physical strength, athletic skill—that are not related to "book learning" or the classroom, and indeed the submission that is frequently required by teachers before they will give high grades is utterly repugnant to the masculine self-image. On the other hand,

> girls achieve via conformity. . . . The girl whose parents do not value higher education will begin to look towards marriage or a job somewhat earlier, and educational achievement will decline in importance. The intellectual, high achieving girl who is educationally motivated through the early school years has little in the way of cultural expectations to sustain her motivation into adulthood.

Although more women than ever before are enrolling in colleges (U.S. Department of Labor, 1959), and although the fact that they are competing for admission to coeducational institutions constitutes an increasing pressure upon high school boys to conform more closely to patterns of academic achievement, it does not seem likely that this represents any significant movement away from the traditional feminine role. Early marriage has assumed a more and more important place in the plans of young women, and it has tended to depress the drive towards academic excellence at the higher educational levels. Not only are more girls getting married instead of going to college, or leaving college in order to raise families, but so high a proportion of them get married as soon as they graduate from college that they are not interested in the possibility or utility of advanced or professional training.

Complexity of the Problem

When all these questions have been explored, and all the intimate connections of scarcely understood social and psychological phenomena have at last been sorted out, doubtless much will remain unknown about individual greatness of mind. Brilliant achievement appears in the most adverse circumstances. At times it almost seems to flourish because of adversity. Some individuals thus seem to have influences at work within them to palliate or invert the effect of environment; while others seem somehow more simply responsive to their environment and ready to cooperate with adversity. It is unrealistic to hope that we shall ever find any one decisive variable which can account for the difference between achievers and underachievers. Therefore, no simple procedures can be relied upon to deal with the problems of underachievement in the schools.

Usually, the first thing a teacher does when he discovers unused or inhibited ability in a student is to recommend tutoring or remedial reading or special instruction in study skills, and though these are often effective, they do not in general appear to reverse patterns of underachievement which have been part of the student's "life style" for many years. The very complexity of the problem as it reveals itself in existing research suggests that many professional and clinical resources of the community must be brought to bear on learning disorders; and particularly important among them will be interdisciplinary techniques such as are found in orthopsychiatry. For example, in the New York City Talent Preservation Project referred to previously, a wide range of substudies were undertaken, combining several kinds of clinical diagnostic measures (Binets, Rorschachs, psychiatric evaluation, psychological interviews, home interviews) with various remedial services (group therapy, group counseling, study skills tutoring, parent counseling groups, reading clinics, individual counseling, grants-in-aid). Two prominent conclusions were that: (1) important as such services are to the adolescent, service is best begun earlier and (2) the multidiscipline approach, using a clinical team, is particularly effective. As a result, New York City organized the Early Identification and Prevention Program in 42 elementary schools (Krugman and Impellizzeri, 1960), with the explicit purpose of preventing or minimizing maladjustment and learning disorders and employing clinical teams, consisting of a full-time elementary school counselor, a half-time psychologist, and a half-time social worker, with medical and psychiatric services available.

Since the problem of underachievement is large and intricate, it makes a large and deep claim upon us for work and devoted attention. The claim is not merely one of social importance. It transcends military and economic needs. A recent report on education, the *Pursuit of Excellence*, says: "We deplore the destruction of human potentialities through disease, and we are prepared to fight such destruction wherever we meet it. We believe that man—by virtue of his humanity—should live in the light of reason, exercise moral responsibility, and be free to develop to the full the talents that are in him." (Rockefeller Brothers Fund, p. 1.)

This moral imperative defines the scope and importance of the problem of underachievement.

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CHAPTER II

Definition and Identification of Academic Underachievers

Merville C. Shaw II

The Problem of Definition

For purposes of this bulletin, the following definition will be used: *The underachiever with superior ability is one whose performance, as judged either by grades or achievement test scores, is significantly below his high measured or demonstrated aptitudes or potential for academic achievement.* This definition of underachievement is extremely broad, but for purposes of identifying, understanding, and helping underachievers, irrespective of causal factors, it will serve adequately. Thus, it constitutes a working definition, rather than a research definition, and is intended primarily for use of people in a practical situation where they are faced with the ongoing and real problem of academic underachievement. The reader interested in the problems involved in constructing a research definition should consult a dissertation by Davis (1959) which thoroughly explores a number of aspects of the problem of defining underachievement for research purposes.

Even a cursory glance through the many professional journals which have recently concerned themselves with the problem of academic underachievement could hardly help confusing the casual reader. Most confusing of all, perhaps, are the apparently conflicting results reported in different research studies. The first reaction of the uninitiated reader of such articles might be that attempts to understand academic underachievement in terms of personality traits, causal factors, or other general characteristics have thus far led to no useful conclusions and are destined to lead nowhere. A deeper and more sophisticated look at such research would reveal, however, that much of the difficulty apparent in attempts to compare one study with another arises from the fact that the term "academic underachievement" has been used to refer to groups of individuals working on different academic levels, with differing levels of ability, and with different levels of achievement. To further confuse the issue, different criteria of achievement and of ability have been used.

This publication is concerned primarily with those individuals whose academic talents are greater than those of most other students. These talents may be measured either through the use of some type of general ability test (single score measure) or by one of the factored aptitude batteries. The definition does not rule out the place of teacher judgment in helping arrive at a decision as to when a given individual is superior in the academic area. One reaction to the definition offered here might be that it cuts across the boundaries of a number of other categories into which school children are often grouped. Among these are juvenile delinquents and dropouts. Certainly, in these two groups underachievement is the rule rather than the exception, but it is important to point out that most bright underachievers are neither delinquents nor dropouts but a relatively stable group which seldom displays delinquent behavior or drops out of school before completing the 12th grade.

The present definition also alludes to two different criteria by which achievement may be measured. These are grades and achievement test scores. Contrary to what seems to be popular opinion, discrepancies between the results of standardized achievement tests and teacher grades sometimes exist. Nowhere is this difference more striking than among those children whose grades indicate they are performing far below their potential, but whose achievement test scores consistently indicate that they have learned material for which their grades do not give them credit. It has been a typical research experience to find that students classified as underachievers on the basis of grades, characteristically are achieving at, or near, their true level of potential as indicated by the results of standardized achievement tests. The converse situation is not always true. Typically, if a high-ability student has received high grades, his achievement scores will reflect this. Only occasionally do high-ability students who have received high grades fall below their expected level of performance on standardized achievement tests. It should be stressed that a group of students picked as underachievers on the basis of grades will be largely constituted of different individuals than a group of students picked as underachievers on the basis of achievement test scores. Of course there will be some overlap, but there will also be some striking differences.

Identification of Bright Underachievers

The most efficient way to initiate a program aimed at identifying bright underachievers is to begin with available intelligence or aptitude test data. The question of how high a score an individual must have on such a test to be considered "bright" remains to plague educators but, in the last analysis, it is largely a question of individual preference and available facilities for dealing with the problem. If guidance facilities are plentiful and of a high caliber, then a broader segment of students may be considered than if the reverse situation is true. In view of the current pressure being exerted on all sides for us to utilize to the fullest all of our intellectual resources, it might perhaps be wise to consider every child who is in the top quartile on a general intelligence test or on the linguistic or quantitative subtests of a factored aptitude battery. In most school situations, the selection of a group of underachievers from the top quartile with respect to ability is probably the most defensible procedure. If, for reasons which prevail locally, it does not appear desirable to use such a broad segment as the top 25 percent, and a more restricted segment of the population is used, there is a compensating factor. This lies in the fact that we can be more sure we are dealing with underachievers when the difference between ability and academic performance is greater, as it could be if only very high ability pupils were to be selected. Thus a student whose score on a scholastic aptitude test placed him at the 98th percentile and whose grades place him at the 45th percentile can be identified with more certainty as an underachiever than one whose score in the same test places him at the 75th percentile while his grades rank him, also, at the 45th percentile.

Although tests should probably remain the basic criteria for the selection of a high-ability group, teacher judgment, as previously stated, should not be ignored, since some research on underachievement has indicated that underachievers do poorly, not only in academic work, but also on ability tests. This latter situation would be particularly true on scholastic aptitude tests heavily loaded with achievement-type material. The danger of using teacher judgment for such purposes is apparent to most experienced educators; namely, that irrelevant factors such as mode of dress, manners, family background, social conformity, and a multitude of others enter in to distort our judgments of native ability. Some individuals are more easily misled by these factors than others and are consequently poorer judges of any child's ability. (National Education Association, 1950.)

One type of high-ability child most likely to be missed by standardized intelligence or aptitude tests is the child who does not conform. His intellectual gifts may be apparent in other ways, however, and behavior considered to be highly intelligent or creative by his teachers should certainly be taken into account, regardless of intelligence test results. That such a group will constitute a small fraction of the total hardly needs to be pointed out.

Having selected the upper segment of the population with regard to ability, it remains to select from this group those who can be considered to be underachievers. It has been previously noted that the use of grades and achievement test scores as indices of underachievement are likely to result in the formation of two essentially different groups with essentially different problems. A majority of the research studies on underachievement have made use of academic grades as the criterion of underachievement, although the rationale for doing this is not usually presented in such studies. Possibly the social significance of grades, their implications for the educational future of students, and/or the component of personal judgment embodied in the grading process provide an answer to the question of why grades are most frequently used as the index of achievement. There is no reason why both criteria might not be used in any one school although it will be found that two different groups of students will be selected, with some overlap. The treatment of each of these two groups should probably be different, with those youngsters who fall down primarily on achievement tests receiving remedial help of an academic nature and those who do poorly primarily in terms of grades being exposed to counseling or psychotherapeutic processes.

Any selection of a grade-point average at which a bright student is considered to be underachieving must be recognized as an arbitrary process. It is probably reasonable to consider a child as an underachiever if he is in the upper 25 percent of his class with regard to intellectual ability and falls below the class average with respect to the grades he receives. At the present time and in the practical situation, such a rule of thumb is probably as good or better than a more sophisticated definition. If future research is able to define the parameters of underachievement in more adequate fashion than is presently the case, then more complex differentiations may be justified.

The use of an overall average rather than a grade in any particular class constitutes the most defensible kind of criterion, since underachievers often respond more to the personality of the individual teaching the course than to any fear of getting a poor grade. A relatively simple way to determine whether or not the group selected does indeed represent the underachievers in a particular class would be to apply one of the appropriate statistical tests of the significance of differences between means (such as the critical ratio or one of its variations) in order to determine if the mean grade-point average in the group defined as bright underachievers and the mean grade-point average of the group defined as achievers is a significant one. While this may sound a bit too technical to many, it is in reality a simple statistical process and will serve to verify or refute the existence of differences between achiever and underachiever groups. Additional problems in the identification of bright underachievers are imposed in situations where ability grouping systems, or grading systems not based solely on subject matter mastery, are employed. In such situations, teacher judgment as to which students are not performing up to their capacity becomes increasingly important.

The use of achievement tests for the selection of academic underachievers would follow roughly the same pattern; that is to say, the child who is in the upper 25 percent of his class with regard to ability but falls below the class median on his achievement tests may logically be considered an underachiever. Some achievement test batteries provide composite scores which are useful in the selection of underachievers, but most do not. Since it is not appropriate to average percentile ranks, the conversion of achievement test scores to standard scores which may be averaged would be an advisable procedure if a composite score is desired. It should be reemphasized, however, that the criterion of underachievement, as well as the level of performance on that criterion, are matters which are subject to the arbitrary decision of the individuals involved in the identification process. No specific level of ability nor criteria of underachievement have been established, nor are they likely to be, any more than we are likely to establish absolute criteria for what constitutes giftedness. There is room for teacher judgment, not only in the matter of ability level, but also in the matter of achievement level. The place where teacher judgment is likely to prove most important in this latter regard is in the case of the particularly gifted individual who obtained high scores on achievement tests and also gets high grades, but who, in the teacher's opinion, may nevertheless be functioning below the level at which he is capable of performing.

Types of Underachievement

It has been previously implied that more than one type of underachievement exists. An illustration of this situation is provided by contrasting the individual who gets low grades but high achievement test scores with the individual who gets high grades but low achievement test scores. While it would be dangerous to speculate, in the absence of any sound research information, on the precise nature of the differences between two groups formed of such individuals, it is probably safe to say that some important and basic differences do exist, possibly in the areas of personality, socialization, or study skills.

Still another way of categorizing underachievers is seen when we contrast the chronic underachiever with the situational underachiever. The chronic underachiever may be defined as one who consistently, from one year to the next, performs below the level of which he is capable. This consistency may not show up equally in all classes, since even the chronic underachiever will, at times, encounter a situation in which he succeeds in the eyes of the teacher, but his underachieving performance will be both general and fairly consistent. The situational underachiever, on the other hand, is one whose underachieving behavior is of a transitory nature, the causes of which can generally be discovered quite readily. Thus the lowered academic performance which sometimes follows a serious illness, the upset caused by the death of a parent, the physical and psychological problems accompanying growth spurts in adolescence, the personal problems engendered when a child attempts to wean himself from overprotective parents, and many other similar kinds of situations, all may be productive of academic underachievement which may be relatively short in its duration.

It has been the rule, rather than the exception, for most educators to consider nearly all underachievers as being of the transitory sort. Recent research, however, has revealed that this is not the case and that most underachievers at the high school level have been underachieving from an early age. (Barrett, 1957; Shaw and McCuen, 1960.) This difference has likewise not been recognized in most available research studies, where relatively short-term indices of achievement and underachievement have been used. Failure to recognize the difference between the two kinds of underachievement has undoubtedly led to further confusion in research findings. Failure to recognize these differences in a treatment or a remedial program would likewise have confusing effects.

Still a third general type of underachievement which deserves mention is hidden underachievement. Hidden underachievement can be divided into two general categories. The first category is created by the fact that some underachievers not only do poorly on achievement tests and in grades, but also perform poorly on intelligence or aptitude tests. This is a particularly difficult kind of underachievement to detect and certainly the teacher's judgment in this case would be a primary criteria. It has been demonstrated that some children picked as underachievers on this basis show a marked improvement in intelligence and aptitude test scores following exposure to a treatment program. (Ohlsen and Proff, 1960.) A second type of hidden underachievement is equally difficult to diagnose. This situation occurs in students of the highest ability. Looking at their grades and achievement test scores would lead one to believe that these individuals were performing far above the level of most other students, which, indeed, they are. However, teachers sometimes have a feeling about such individuals that they are not doing what they are capable of doing in spite of a superior level of performance. This hypothesis is sometimes supported when such students enter collegiate institutions which are highly restrictive in their admittance policies and subsequently perform below the level of other students, in spite of having adequate ability to do the work. Research findings along these lines have been presented by Heist (1960).

Characteristics of Underachievers

In the past, it has been said that academic underachievement among bright students has so many causes and occurs in such diverse individuals that no general causes or common personal factors could be said to exist among underachievers. Recent research findings, however, have given reason to believe that this may not be the case and that perhaps some general causes for academic underachievement may exist as well as some characteristics which tend to be generally true for most underachievers. Of course, it is important to specify what type of underachiever one is discussing, chronic versus situational or low grades and high achievement test scores versus high grades and low achievement test scores. Each of these groups is likely to have its own peculiar causes and identifying characteristics. In addition, it is important to consider the nature of the situation in which the underachievement is occurring. There is evidence to suggest that factors peculiar to specific situations may influence both the prevalence of underachievement and the kinds of individuals who become underachievers. (Heist, 1960.)

The results of nearly all research studies on academic underachievement can be considered most applicable to chronic underachievers who are getting low grades but relatively high achievement test scores. This situation has arisen because most studies have made no attempt to differentiate among types of underachievers but have lumped them together, and, in most undifferentiated groups of underachievers, the chronic underachiever who receives low grades but high achievement test scores will predominate.

One of the most striking and most universally agreed upon characteristics of underachievement is the fact that it is predominantly a male problem. A review of the studies which have explored this problem would indicate that approximately half of all males who are above average in ability may be considered underachievers. The corresponding figure for females is approximately 25 percent. These proportions will vary from one school to another, sometimes in a very striking manner, but these figures give a reasonably accurate approximation of the general situation.

Male and female differences in underachieving groups extend beyond the simple question of numbers. Another primary difference lies in the general pattern of academic underachievement shown by male and female underachievers. Chronic male underachievers tend to display underachieving behavior in the earliest grades, while very few females show this characteristic. Females, in general, begin to demonstrate serious underachieving behavior in their late elementary or junior high school grades. The reasons for this difference have not yet been the subject of research, but that the difference exists seems to be fairly well established. (Shaw and McCuen, 1960.)

Family Background and Underachievement

The early existence of underachieving behavior, particularly among males, would seem to imply that underachievement is a problem which is not unique to the school situation but which stems from and exists in other areas in the underachiever's life. A number of studies into the home backgrounds and parental attitudes and child-rearing practices of the fathers and mothers of underachievers have indeed revealed the existence of some significant differences between families of achievers and underachievers. As might be expected, underachievers tend to come from homes where the parents have less education than do the parents of achievers. (Granzow, 1954; Pearlman, 1952; Ratchick, 1953; Terman, 1947; Westfall, 1958.) Not only do they have less education, but their values tend to be either neutral or negative with respect to education, while the parents of achievers tend to value education positively. It has also been shown that the relationship which exists between the underachiever and his parents tends to be a more distant one, psychologically speaking, than that which exists between the achiever and his parents. (Bishton, 1955;

Gowan, 1955; Hobbs, 1958.) The parents of achievers also show a greater inclination to push their children toward achievement, not only in school, but in other areas as well. The parents of underachievers not only appear to demand less in the way of specific performance from their children, but also tend to make demands at a later date than the parents of achievers usually do. (Drews, 1957; Winterbottom, 1953.) Broken homes, working mothers, and other family disruptions are found in much higher proportions among the parents of underachievers. (Ford, 1957; Roe, 1953; Ryan, 1951.) There is at least a suggestion from some research that female underachievers may actually be rejected children. (Shaw, 1960.) Family size and constellation also appear to have some bearing upon the existence of underachievement, with underachievers tending to come from larger families. (Pierce, 1960.)

Personality Characteristics of Underachievers

Personality characteristics of underachievers have been the subject of wide and intensive study. There seems to be no conclusive agreement among the results of various studies on the question of whether or not underachievers are more poorly adjusted generally than are achievers. Results of studies on this question are so conflicting that no final conclusions can be drawn at this time. (Gough, 1949; Liebman, 1954; New York City Talent Preservation Project, 1959; Shaw and Brown, 1957.) In contrast to this, however, there are a number of specific characteristics which different research studies appear to agree upon. One of the most promising aspects of the personality of underachievers yet studied has been that of the self-concept. There is rather general agreement that underachievers generally are more negative in their attitudes toward themselves than are achievers. There is also evidence to indicate that they tend to be more negative in their evaluations of others. (Alves, 1960; Nason, 1958; Portland Public Schools, 1957; Shaw, Edson and Bell, 1960.) These findings are in rather direct contrast with the superficial picture often presented by the underachiever of an aggressive, self-assured individual.

The findings with regard to the self-concept of underachievers are, however, supported by additional findings from other areas. It has been demonstrated by a number of studies that underachievers show a higher degree of hostility than do achievers. (Ohlsen and Proff, 1960; Shaw and Brown, 1957; Shaw and Grubb, 1958.) This hostility is generally shown in attitudes towards other people which display a general feeling of distrust and lack of faith in others on the part of the underachiever. These attitudes are most often reflected by feelings which embody the idea that it is necessary to look out for yourself first and that the rights of others are not to be considered when your own welfare is at stake. The findings with regard to negative self-concepts among underachievers are further supported by studies which indicate the existence of stronger feelings of inferiority among underachievers than are found among achievers. (Kurtz and Swenson, 1951.) Still other studies support the idea of negative self-concept with the finding that underachievers tend to have stronger ego defenses than do achievers. One of these studies indicates that while underachievers tend to be strictly honest in owning up to their mistakes, they then proceed to rationalize their errors in such a way that they are personally not responsible. Conversely, the achievers tended simply to deny that they had made any error, thus no rationalization or defense was necessary. (Shaw and Black, 1960.)

The concept of achievement motivation has undergone some study with underachieving students, and the results have been conflicting in nature. Two instruments frequently used to measure achievement motivation are the McClelland Achievement Motivation Test and the Need Achievement Scale of the Edwards Personal Preference Inventory. Although there has been no unanimity of agreement, the general trend of these studies has been to indicate that these instruments do not differentiate significantly between achiever and underachiever groups. (Atkinson, 1950; Bendig, 1957; McClelland, 1953; Morgan, 1952; Weiss, Wertheimer, and Groesbeck, 1960; Uhlinger and Stephens, 1960.) In spite of this trend, it would be well at the present time to reserve any final conclusions with regard to the practical usefulness of these instruments in differentiating between academic achievers and underachievers until further and more rigorously controlled studies are forthcoming. At this time, it is reasonable to say that the concept of academic motivation, which is often employed to explain underachieving behavior, has little utility either in differentiating between achieving and underachieving groups or in explaining the phenomenon of underachievement. Whether or not it has any theoretical usefulness remains as yet an essentially unanswered question.

Yet another area for much study of the underachiever has been one which is frequently defined as relating to the problem of maturity. It has been found generally that the underachiever demonstrates behavior considered to be less mature that that which is shown by his achieving peers. (Altus, 1948; Burgess, 1956.) This immaturity is more frequently demonstrated by a lack of self-discipline which is often manifested in the inability of the underachiever to undertake and complete tasks which are not entirely pleasant to him. Allied with this finding is the finding that underachievers have a difficult time in working for distant goals. (Nason, 1958; Rezler, 1960.) They need to see immediate results from their work. Thus, it is a common experience for a college counselor to have an underachiever tell him, in most vehement terms, that he wants a college degree, but at the same time show utterly no comprehension of the fact that the satisfactory completion of a course at the freshman level is a necessary step in the achievement of the expressed goal. It is likewise difficult for the underachiever to accept unpleasant reality. He often treats difficult or tedious academic assignments as if he believes they will go away if he just doesn't think about them.

Underachievement and Creativity

An additional and important area which has been the subject of little research is the factor of creativity. One of the major barriers to research on creativity is the lack of valid criteria, and yet the problem is one of such importance that it would be desirable to study this variable further with present techniques rather than to wait for further developments of valid measures of creativity. The relatively sketchy available evidence is conflicting with regard to quantity and quality of creative processes in underachievers.

One recent study (Getzels and Jackson, 1958) appears to indicate that there is little relationship between intelligence and creativity, and Maslow (1954) considers creativity to be a function of personality, rather than of intellectual level. This position would not be challenged by a large number of psychologists and teachers of the gifted who have had the experience of working with high-ability children and who have seen that, while some of these students are highly ingenious, self-motivated, and curious, many others are not.

It is necessary, however, to raise the question of whether or not creative ability of a highly complex, difficult, and abstract sort might be found only among individuals who attained high scores on measures of intelligence or aptitude. If creativity were to be ranked in terms of difficulty, complexity, and abstractness, it seems reasonable to expect a higher relationship between measured ability and creativity than has thus far been found. An excellent statement on the subject of intelligence and creativity has been made by Drews (1960).

A further study has suggested either that achievers are succeeding through conformity or that underachievers are failing through nonconformity, or some combination of the two situations is in operation. (Shaw and Black, 1960.) Since it is generally assumed, and has been at least tentatively establised, that nonconformity and creativity are related, there is a real question, as yet unanswered, as to whether or not underachievers do in fact constitute a significant, untapped reservoir of creative talent whose members are suffering primarily because they will not do the routine and mundane things which their culture expects from them. Some findings which tend to refute this have been made to the effect that high-achieving students value the concept of imagination to a significantly higher degree than their low-achieving peers. (Pierce, 1960.) In general it can be stated that we have no final answers with regard to the nature of creative talent extant among underachieving children and much further study is both needed and merited in this particular area.

Underachievement and Socialization

The social behavior of underachievers has been extensively studied. The most common finding is that underachievers engage in social activities to a greater extent than achievers. (Altus, 1948; Bishton, 1955; Gough, 1949; Owens and Johnson, 1949.) In the past this has been interpreted to mean that time spent in socialization was time spent away from studies, thus causing poor grades. In the light of more recent studies, however, this interpretation must be abandoned, and a more dynamic explanation substituted. The reported extroversion of underachievers may represent an attempt to bolster the inadequacy and lack of acceptance which underachievers feel by their proving to themselves that they can get along with other people. Even a negative relationship with people may be more satisfying than no relationship at all. As Phyllis McGinley has said:

> Sticks and stones can break the bones
> When thrown with angry art,
> Words can sting like anything,
> But silence breaks the heart.[1]

Perhaps the most important single factor which has been demonstrated by recent research is that academic underachievement among bright students is not a temporary phenomenon easily modifiable but, rather, represents a relatively fixed kind of behavior which reflects something basic in the personality structure of the behaver. Exhortation, threats, or mere wishful thinking are not likely to change it.

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[1] Neither the idea of preference for hostile social relationships over no relationship at all, nor the use of Miss McGinley's quotation to dramatize the idea are original with the present author. See LeShan, L., Some Aspects of the Positive Values of Hostility, *Amer. Psychol.*, 13:118–119, 1958, and McGinley, Phyllis, *The Love Letters of Phyllis McGinley*, (New York: Viking Press, 1954).

While research has revealed the answer to some of the questions posed by underachieving behavior, many of the most basic questions remain still to be answered.

The search for specific traits which characterize underachievers as compared to achievers has not been particularly rewarding. More fruitful have been studies looking for general personality characteristics which might result in the development of different traits in different individuals, depending on circumstance. The studies of self-concept are illustrative of this type of research. Another generally productive type of research on underachievement is that which has attempted to study the underachiever's interpretation of his parents' attitudes and child-rearing practices. Further studies of the value systems of both the underachiever and his parents may be rewarding.

One area in which research has been suggestive, but not conclusive, has been a study of the relationship between the process of physical maturation and academic achievement. Another potentially productive area is that of constitution and bodily build and their relation to academic achievement. Lacking also is information on what happens to underachievers after the end of their public school careers. Do they continue to manifest underachieving behavior in their vocational, community, and personal lives, or is academic underachievement a phenomenon associated only with school? These unanswered questions, and others, stand as imposing barriers to our more complete understanding of the bright, underachieving child, at the present time.

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CHAPTER III

What Can Be Done at the Elementary Level

Anna R. Meeks

SINCE the elementary school has contact with a child approximately from his 5th birthday until after his 11th birthday, it has a responsibility to provide effective guidance services for all children during these years. The problem of underachievement at the secondary school level may have its roots in failure to provide such services at the elementary level. Certainly, the problem of the underachiever with superior ability will be intensified at the secondary school and college levels if guidance services have been ineffective or lacking in the early years of his school experience.

There is evidence that academic underachievement is present in the earliest school years and that it is a fairly consistent characteristic of the same individuals throughout their school careers. Shaw and McCuen (1960) in a study of *The Onset of Academic Underachievement in Bright Children* had evidence that among males, underachievers in grade 11 tended to receive grades lower than achievers beginning in the first grade and that this difference became significant at the .01 level at grade 3. This difference increased in significance every year from grade 3 to grade 10. They further found that the girls who became underachievers in grade 11 actually had exceeded the achiever group in grade 11 during the first 5 years of school but began a sharp decrease in achievement in grade 6, remaining below the achiever group from grade 6 through grade 11. During the ages from 5 to 11, the school has the opportunity to identify and to attempt to correct those factors which contribute to underachievement.

Any honest attempt to reduce the problem of underachievement must be based on an acceptance of the broad implications of individual differences. Shaw and McCuen's study indicates a need to raise different questions about the male and the female underachiever. They imply that the school must gain greater understanding of sex differences in maturation and motivation. The concept of readiness for learning needs greater clarification. There has been a wide acceptance of a readiness level for reading instruction, but many schools have failed to recognize that there are readiness levels for all types of learning with patterns showing wide differences in each individual child. The misconception that readiness for reading is evidence of a general readiness for all learning may well be a basic factor in underachievement. Furthermore, there are factors, not of school origin, contributing to underachievement. The child with superior ability may enter school already conditioned to failure. For example, such children often come from culturally deprived environments or are members of minority groups. The school cannot plan an adequate program for these children unless it recognizes them as individuals with potential. The elementary school which is making a serious effort to reduce underachievement by pupils with superior ability must develop an effective program of guidance services.

Functions of Guidance for Underachievers

Children with superior ability share with all elementary children the many needs which are provided for in a program of guidance services. In addition, bright children have unique needs arising from their superior ability. They may need help in handling relationships with less mature children; their intensive interest in specific areas and their tendency to question data may often make them annoying to teachers and other children; routines and drills may become irksome and may cause them to lose their motivations for learning. Also, adult expectations for the academically able child may exert pressures which adversely affect the pupil. Though the child may have a genuine desire to learn, he still learns within his maturity level, and he must not be treated as an adult. Guidance services can help solve many of these problems.

Prevention of Underachievement

Prevention of underachievement demands early and continuous identification of children with superior ability. Kough (1960) says:

> Many students with outstanding ability "identify" themselves. It is obvious to the teacher and to everyone who works with these students that they are bright. . . . There are, however, other children who are equally bright but who present a more difficult problem in identification. These students will not identify themselves on the basis of outstanding school

> achievement. Their grades may be low; they may be noncooperative in performing school assignments and may exhibit chronic behavior problems of one type or another. They may be irritants to the teachers because of their nonconformist attitudes or seeming laziness. One of the critical jobs of the school is to identify and motivate some of these not-so-obviously gifted students.

Two guiding principles in identification presented in the publication *Elementary Education and the Academically Talented Pupil* (National Education Association, 1961) are especially pertinent. They are:

> Identification should begin early, preferably in kindergarten or the first grade. This is important for several reasons. First, if a child has outstanding ability at the age of twelve, such ability was most likely apparent at an earlier age. Second, a great deal of pertinent information can be obtained at an early age, especially through observation and biographical data. As some bright children grow older, they acquire behavior that tends to "cover up" their ability, thus making identification more difficult. Third, there is evidence that modifiability of the whole syndrome of habits and attitudes which foster optimal development is greater in earlier than in later years. Finally, the abilities of young children must be known if the instructional program is to be challenging to every child, regardless of his age.
>
> The plan for identification should involve many people—administrators, teachers, psychologists and guidance personnel, special consultants, parents and even children themselves. The use of so many persons necessitates a well coordinated effort, facilitated by a well conceived plan. All concerned must be familiar with the plan and with their own unique role in it. Even then, some one person—is needed to give leadership and direction.

Child study, an essential guidance function for all children, has a most significant role in the school's effort to provide meaningful learning experiences for children with superior ability. Children enter school with wide differences in chronological and mental ages, in social and economic backgrounds, and in physical and emotional development. Bright children in grade 1 will have widely varied needs because they may vary by a full year in chronological age; may have come from rich cultural experiences or may be culturally starved; may abound in physical energy or be suffering from physical deficiencies; may have experienced warm emotional relationships with children and adults or be emotionally undernourished. Such divergent backgrounds make it difficult to recognize all children with superior ability in the early years of the school experience. Therefore, the school must provide for continuing identification processes. Any attempt to prevent underachievement must include a plan for an effective program of child study.

Role of the Teacher in Child Study

The kindergarten teacher has an opportunity to study levels of maturity and individual needs through observations and parent conferences. She also begins health records and records of progress in adjusting to school. The first-grade teacher with pupils who are entering school for the first time must combine this analysis of the individual with the beginnings of formal instruction. Great care must be taken in these first months of school to avoid mistakes which may reinforce the child's conditioning to failure and his concept of himself as an inadequate individual in the family and in the classroom.

The teacher has an opportunity to observe the pupil in group learning, independent study, free and organized play, sharing a meal in the cafeteria, and enjoying cultural experiences in art, music, and dramatics. As the teacher observes behavior of the pupils in these varying situations, he can see evidence of maturity which may suggest that here is a child of superior ability. Kough and DeHaan (1955) caution that any attempt to identify children of intellectual ability must avoid too much emphasis on achievement, conformity, or study habits as evidence of superior ability if the identification process is to be effective. They offer lists of identifying characteristics which make a sound basis for observation of behaviors. To facilitate organization of these records, a roster workbook is available. Teachers can use anecdotal records, rating instruments such as the Haggerty-Olson-Wickman Behavior Rating Scale, student productions such as art work and written work, and the autobiography or daily log in the study of individual pupils. Johnston, Peters, and Evariff (1959) offer some suggestions for more effective use of these procedures.

When the parent-teacher conference is a sharing experience rather than a reporting experience, it can provide an interpretation of the child as he appears in both home and school. Such a conference can give insight into unsuspected areas of interest or ability. As is pointed out in *Elementary Education and the Academically Talented Pupil* (National Education Association, 1961):

> The parents have known the child longer and have seen him react to his environment more often and in a greater variety of ways than have any other person. They have a great deal of pertinent information that can be useful in identifying academically talented children, though for many reasons they are frequently unable to evaluate this information adequately. First, parents usually have not had the opportunity to compare the performance of their child with large groups of children of the same age. Second, the closeness of the parent to the child is a liability as well as an asset in evaluation. Parents tend to be biased and some are overly ambitious for their children, unconsciously hoping to fulfill their own longings through their youngsters.

Parents, by sharing their observations with teachers, can gain insight concerning the child's needs, and teacher and parent can plan together to meet these needs.

The more informal methods of child study must be supplemented with the use of cumulative and developmental records which provide for systematic recording of data. Such records usually include personal data, home and community data, scholarship records, test scores and ratings, attendance data, health information, activity records, interview notes, and followup information. These data can be utilized as an aid to studying and understanding individual pupils in a classroom. Intelligent use of the data obtained through informal and formal methods of child study can enhance the effective discovery of underachieving children with superior ability.

Role of the Counselor in Child Study

A number of criteria are used in identifying children with superior ability. In many schools all children whose score on a standardized test of mental ability is at the 75th percentile or above are placed on a permanent list and the names are retained regardless of achievement. New names are added if children meet requirements in three of the following: (1) school marks; (2) standard test achievement scores; (3) standard reading scores; and (4) professional judgment. The counselor contributes to the collection of data in the area of standardized testing and assists the teacher in making interpretations of the data obtained from the testing program. Reading readiness test results usually form the basis for grouping first-grade children. Since readiness for reading is influenced by chronological age, mental age, and cultural background, care must be observed in the interpretation of the readiness score. The counselor can augment the available data by administering some form of scholastic aptitude test, but results may be doubtful if the children come from culturally limited backgrounds.

Banham's scale *Maturity Level for School Entrance and Reading Readiness* (1950) provides useful data for determining readiness and maturity levels and gives evidence of the child's physical, social, and emotional readiness for learning as well as his reading readiness. Counselors can administer readiness and intelligence scales during the spring term to children who will enter the first grade in the fall. The data provided may help the school avoid mistakes and thus help to prevent underachievement. Since the administration of such scales is time consuming, the first-grade teacher should not be expected to give this test to first-graders in the fall.

Cooperative Roles in Child Study

The principal provides leadership in the development of records and must assume responsibility for collection and recording of data. He is also responsible for inservice education for teachers in the interpretation and use of data. Recognizing that the individual cannot be understood by using isolated data, the administrator and his school staff must work together to develop techniques for organizing data. In this way, observations may be accumulated over a period of time and may reveal physical, emotional, social, and mental growth patterns. Cassell (1955) provides a developmental record approach which can be most effective if teachers, nurse, and counselor work together in the collection, recording, and interpretation of data.

Followup

Pupils identified as having superior ability must be systematically evaluated to discover which ones are achieving at a lower level than their estimated potential. When the elementary school is organized to detect underachievement early, it can correct underachievement before it becomes chronic. For administration, this implies adequate pupil folders for each child of superior ability, and it requires a system of review through case conferences. Counselors can be expected to supervise the maintenance of such folders and to arrange for review and study by the school staff.

A systematic program of testing, for periodic data on both ability and achievement levels, makes it possible to compare achievement as shown by tests with subject matter grades. Also, scattergrams are valuable in identifying underachievers. Periodically, rating scales, teacher anecdotal records, and pupil survey inventories can be used to determine the child's adjustment to the learning situation.

Conscious and continuous identification, with systematic followup of each child, can provide the basic data needed to insure a learning situation for the child, thereby permitting him to achieve on a level more nearly commensurate with his ability.

Providing Stimulating and Challenging Learning Situations

Morgan (1960) says: "Every human being possesses a basic urge to grow. Every human being has an inborn drive to become more of himself, to become a fuller self." This urge is nurtured through stimulating educational experiences in a school climate which supports warm relationships and reasonable expectations. A learning situation can be challenging if careful consideration has been given to content, timing, meaningfulness, and sequence. If educational experiences make unreasonable or untimely demands on children, the urge to grow may be smothered. Morgan suggests "in promoting intellectual development, significant persons in a child's life must utilize this urge to grow, this drive to satisfy curiosity, this striving for exploration, this force to create, this push to extend oneself."

A basic drive for achievement develops in children at an early age and is difficult to modify. The school can redirect but cannot build a basic drive. Low academic aspirations often result, not because of opposition to high goals, but because no one has said to the child, "you should." Sometimes the underachieving pupil with superior ability seems to have lost his basic motivation for learning. Often, too, he suffers from low self-esteem. While out-of-school factors may be responsible for this self-depreciation, it sometimes is intensified by classroom pressures to do monotonous and demotivating drills. Others of these children may have failed to develop basic skills in reading or arithmetic due to illness or absences. These possibilities make it imperative that provisions be made for a challenging and stimulating learning situation. Particular attention must be given to the general classroom climate, school placement procedures, and unmet personal needs of the child.

Meeting the Needs of Teachers and Other Staff Members

The elementary teacher determines the classroom climate. When the teacher experiences warm, satisfying relationships as a member of a school staff, he in turn helps to provide warm and supporting relationships for the children in his class.

A democratic school administration makes it possible for the teacher to develop a sense of personal worth, of identification with the goals and purposes of the school, and of satisfaction in his teaching. The principal accepts responsibility to meet the personal need of teachers for acceptance, recognition, and a sense of adequacy for the job. He sees the development of good human relationships as the best single approach to improved classroom teaching. Sound administrative practices provide for effective communication, for the utilization of group dynamics, and for inservice education and professional growth.

Placement Procedures

Providing a challenging learning situation for each child requires placement procedures which allow flexible grouping, which utilize readiness factors, and which recognize teacher-child relationships.

Continuous evaluation of an underachieving child will often reveal academic growth beyond that of the group in which the child has been working. Removing a child from his group to another learning situation may be an effective way to meet his needs. An unwillingness to let children work beyond a certain grade level may be a major factor in the demotivation of some able children. Conversely, the evaluation may show that the child has a lack of readiness to work with his present group. Flexibility in grouping will allow the child to work in different groups according to his readiness for learning in reading, arithmetic, or other areas. This flexibility is sometimes achieved by permitting able students to move from teacher to teacher and from class to class within the school day. Case conference procedures can be used to keep the children in focus as individuals.

Flexible placement policies are easier to achieve when they are the results of cooperative staff action. Teachers are more likely to accept pupil changes in an assigned class if such changes are provided for in a staff policy. This is particularly true when a change is indicated because of a teacher-child conflict.

Readiness for learning and teacher-child relationships must be the determining factors in effective placement of all children, but they assume even greater significance for the underachieving child of superior ability. Past failure to give due consideration to these factors may well have been the basis of untimely and unreasonable expectations for the child which helped to destroy his motivation to learn.

Providing Challenging Content

The teacher, working with the principal and the supervisor, can provide a program to motivate the child by using his urge to grow. Recognizing that the child often does not need drill to learn, he allows the child to discover new relationships, to experiment and explore. He accepts the child as a partner in the exciting search for knowledge. Independent study, creative experiences in science, mathematics, art, and music, and wide contact with the minds of others through books and class visitors are all essential aspects of a challenging program which can stretch the mind and the imagination of the child.

Unless the underachieving child has serious unmet personal needs, the best single force for motivating him is an alert, imaginative, and understanding teacher. Conversely the greatest single demotivating force is a dull and monotonous classroom experience which places too much emphasis upon conformity. Biber (1959) places great stress on the teacher's role in the upper elementary grades.

Recognition of the Child's Personal Needs

In spite of challenging educational programs, personality factors may make it impossible for some children to utilize their potential in a creative manner. The identification of those factors which prevent the use of ability is of primary importance. This suggests a need to determine how the child sees himself in relation to his school performance and to discover the relationship between this self-concept and actual performance. If we can discover children with disabling personality factors, we may perhaps determine the ways in which the classroom situation can be used to help the child whose attitudes toward school hinder, rather than enhance, achievement.

Children with unmet personal needs rarely achieve in a manner commensurate with potential. Attention to the general welfare of a child and to his personal needs is an accepted educational procedure which assumes an even greater significance for underachieving children with superior ability.

Factors Producing Discrepancies Between Potential and Performance

Children may enter school conditioned to failure. Such children may react to challenging situations with anxiety or even hostility due to previous adult evaluations of performance. Many of these children may find it so difficult to cope with test situations that identification of potential becomes difficult. Others may have developed behaviors designed to convince the adult that he doesn't like school, he doesn't want to learn, and no one is going to "make him." Whatever the reaction, it signifies the child's need to protect himself from an anxiety-producing situation.

It is difficult to recognize that the "lazy," "indifferent," or "behavior-problem" child is an anxious child. Under these annoying behaviors we must recognize the child's concern with such questions as: (1) Will I ever find out what that teacher wants me to do? (2) Suppose I should give a wrong answer or make a mistake at the board? (3) How am I doing in school? (4) Will I "pass"? (5) Does anybody really care if I learn to read?

The child who is inept socially may be so lost that he cannot concern himself with the concerns of the teacher. Surrounded by potential friends but with no feeling of acceptance by his peers, the child may be in the position of the street gamin with his nose pressed against the bakery window, seeing, smelling, but getting neither nurture nor satisfaction.

Other children may exhibit evidences of physical limitations or of cultural deprivations which prevent them from utilizing potentiality in a creative manner. All the resources of a school staff and a community are needed in order to help meet the needs of these children as a first step in conserving a wealth of human resources.

The Role of the Counselor

The counseling function of the teacher does not remove the need for school counselors. The school counselor is needed to serve as a consultant to teachers, to work with pupils who cannot relate to the teacher, and to work with cases beyond the ability of the teacher. The counselor can be helpful especially in counseling children in the elementary school who have unusual interests or needs. The counselor works with individuals or with groups to help pupils gain insight and self-acceptance.

The guidance office in an elementary school with its toys, art materials, and attractive booklined shelves provides a neutral setting where the counselor helps the child evaluate himself and set goals for himself. Toys play an important role in helping children verbalize their needs. Furnished doll houses and classrooms, erector sets, fire engines or dump trucks, and telephones provide an opportuniity for the child to play and talk as he works with the counselor.

When tensions build up in a class, children often work off these tensions with clay, finger paints, darts, punching bags, or hammer sets. They are then ready to return to class to try again. Avoiding explosions in the class makes it easier for the child to work out his relationships with the teacher and the pupils.

Since underachievement is so closely related to emotional problems, counseling can contribute to improved achievement by helping children gain new courage as they achieve a sense of personal worth. Sometimes a child can be helped to see that he has ability and that someone values him as an individual. The anxious child often needs a safe setting in which to examine his fears. A counselor working with him can help him gain a more realistic evaluation of himself and of his performance in the school.

When working with groups of children, the counselor can take advantage of the group dynamics to obtain results. Using such techniques as the open-ended story, role playing, and group play, the counselor structures a problem situation and then allows free participation by the group. Such activities allow children to face their fears or poor self-concepts in less threatening situations.

Counselors act as consultants to teachers, helping them understand the needs of children. They provide criteria to help teachers recognize any progress which the children may make in their relationship with pupils and staff. Counselors work with parents to help reduce unhealthy pressures hindering the achievement of the children. Contacts with parents are one of the most important ways the school can work with underachievers.

The Team Approach

The work of the counselor must be supplemented by other services. The school team, which includes principal, teacher, nurse, and counselor, can meet the needs of many underachieving children. But, after all resources within the school have been utilized, some children will need more specialized assistance. In support of the school team, the visiting teacher or school social worker can contribute significantly by working with the home.

The visiting teacher or school social worker is also the liaison between the school and the many social agencies and other resources in the school community. Family welfare, children's aid, family counseling services, foster care services, and community health services can be utilized in helping able children solve problems of personal need so that these children may have a better chance to achieve in their school work.

The school psychologist is another specialist who serves the school team by evaluating and diagnosing children's problems and by providing counseling to parents and children.

The reading specialist is assuming an important role in the school's work with the underachiever. When reading problems are identified early in the elementary school and corrective procedures are utilized, many able pupils are helped to improve their total school performance.

Whenever a school cares enough to identify the underachieving child and to work as a team to discover this child's needs, something can be done to allow him an opportunity for a fuller development.

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CHAPTER IV

What Can Be Done at the Secondary Level

Helen G. Stern

Introduction

Guidance for the underachiever with superior ability at the secondary level cuts across the whole fabric of secondary education, involves all of guidance and counseling theory and practice, builds on an emerging body of research findings and implications related to the gifted child and the academically talented, and focuses essentially on the nature and treatment of underachievement.

Scholastic difficulties at the secondary level may first be evident in academic subjects, such as mathematics or foreign language. A student with these difficulties may be rebelling against teacher standards and daily assignments. An underachiever is often identified at the secondary school level because he seems to lack the proper motivation to become a high-achieving student.

In some instances the home or familial climate may have precipitated academic underachievement. Families with an absent or weak father, homes where education is not valued, homes with a history of frequent moves, all may be providing environmental influences which contribute to underachievement.

In other cases, the climate of the school itself may have fostered lowered academic achievement. Rather than underscoring the value of education, some school climates seem to develop patterns of anti-intellectualism or to superimpose attitudes against the worthwhileness of education during and beyond the high school years. In still others, overemphasis on conformity to teacher standards which may have little to do with academic excellence creates attitudes in some students which lead to underachievement. On the other hand, the underachiever at the secondary level may be a youth whose own personal dynamics reflect certain basic phychological, physical, or sociological influences which lead to the development of academic underattainment.

In order to properly assist the underachiever during his junior and senior high school experiences, special guidance and counseling procedures are suggested.

Functions of Staff in Providing Guidance for Underachievers

Effective guidance and counseling of underachievers of superior ability is dependent upon a strong ongoing program of guidance for all students. A thorough and qualitative program for all gifted, utilizing the current techniques recommended in such recent publications as *Working With Superior Students* (Shertzer, 1960) and *Guidance for the Academically Talented* (Drews, 1961) is also a necessity. Guidance of gifted underachievers is actually a new and emerging subspeciality within these frames of references. Some of the most significant contributions to the guidance of underachievers are made in the classroom.

The Role of the Teacher

The teacher's role in working with gifted underachievers cannot be overemphasized. Accepting the underachiever as an individual, treating him fairly but firmly, holding him to his best and not his least efforts, enhancing his learning skills, broadening the base of his knowledge and understandings, and providing a healthy model for him to identify with and emulate are all actions which fall within the domain of the teacher.

Reports by underachievers themselves point up the necessity of the proper attitude on the part of teachers. Teachers who seem to reject gifted underachievers contribute to lowered ambition and motivation. Underachievers state that teachers who are sarcastic, overly critical, overly demanding, rigid, and officious are not helpful. Teachers who judge students as persons only on the basis of performance in their subjects are likewise to a degree ineffectual.

In a special experiment for teaching and guiding gifted underachievers (Goldberg, 1959), students were interviewed concerning their perceptions of themselves and their school experiences. In the words of the report:

> Many of the responses to questions about school success, difficulties, abilities, and other topics were answered in terms of their teachers. Doing well in a subject was usually related to a "good teacher," doing poorly to an unsympathetic or unfair teacher. Their willingness to work in a subject also depended on their perception of the interest of the teacher. The students wanted teachers who merit "respect," and who can "control the class," who "give you an interest in the subjects," and are "cheerful" and "understand the student."

In the same study there is a brief summary of some of the current findings:

> . . . for those students for whom it is possible to effect improvement, two factors appear to be crucial: (1) identification with a teacher who is consistently interested and supportive, who views each student as an individual and accepts him as a bright and able person with a need for special help; and (2) assistance in mastering the skills of learning which many of the underachievers failed to acquire in the earlier grades.

The teacher has a vital contribution to make during staff conferences, usually conducted under the supervision of the school counselor or guidance director. The principal, vice-principal, remedial reading or study skills teacher, school psychologist, and other appropriate specialists are often involved in these conferences. During such case conferences the teacher has valuable information to report on the day-by-day personal and academic behavior of the underachiever. The teacher provides significant information on the nature of the relationship between him and the individual underachiever. A positive teacher-student climate, based on mutual acceptance and respect, is a very helpful factor in improvement. In staff conferences, the teacher should also report on his observations of the peer relationships of the underachiever. This type of information is frequently of value in working with the able but underproductive student.

The teacher has more than a reporter's role in conferences, however. Teachers should be apprised of the observations, evaluations, and recommendations of other specialists, so that later they can return to the classroom to implement these suggestions. Guidance and related specialists should provide support and understanding for the teacher in his efforts to provide maximum educational opportunity.

The Administration and Curricular Adjustment for Underachievers

The administration is often charged with the responsibility for establishing a special, individualized curriculum or course of instruction for gifted underachievers. A course in which the content is differentiated according to the levels of academic talent of the student usually provides a way for such scheduling. Criteria for curricular adjustment include judgments of teachers in the form of tests or grades and objective findings such as results of standardized achievement and aptitude batteries.

Principals, assistant principals, supervisors, directors of curriculum, and other especially assigned personnel, working in conjunction with guidance departments, are typically responsible for the development of differentiated instruction in those subjects where the school has adopted ability grouping. This total consideration is particularly important in the case of the gifted underachievers. While the student has not achieved at a level commensurate with his measured potential, he probably has the capability of doing honors level work. It is the urgent hope of teachers and administration alike that the intellectual climate in advanced groups will serve to motivate the underachiever to improve and thus bring his talent closer to fruition.

In an effort to learn what kinds of approaches to honors programs were in curent use, 37 school systems were surveyed about their scheduling approach for gifted underachievers. (Stern, 1959.) Of the 37 schools, 24 indicated that underachievers were placed in regular groups; 21 stated underachievers were placed in advanced sections, or were eligible for such groups. Eight of the systems used a combination of these two, permitting the student to be scheduled out of the regular group and into the advanced group if his work improved or placing him first in an advanced group and, if he failed to produce, then moving him back to the regular group. In addition, two of the school systems stated that their underachievers were eligible for the College Board Advanced Placement groups, a method used to motivate for higher attainment.

Counselors can serve as a type of academic "talent scout" and report their observations and recommendations to the various teachers. This discovered talent in underachievers should then be encouraged and hopefully trained in the secondary classrooms, laboratories, and studios. In this fashion underachievers can be imbued with the desire to develop their gifts beyond high school.

Special Counseling and Guidance Services

Following are some of the most basic contributions which the school counselor or guidance director can make in the counseling relationship with an underachiever of superior ability.

Personal support.—Perhaps the single most important service a counselor can render the gifted underachiever is to convey an attitude of faith and belief in him, a kind of empathic tie which the counselee senses and knows he can rely on. One effective means the counselor has of relating to the underachiever is to interpret all of the clinical appraisal data as early as possible in the counseling contacts. This should be done thoroughly and objectively, making certain the counselee's interpretation afterward is accurate. Having evaluated the profile, the counselor should build on that data with the counselee, treating the underachievement as though it were a transitional stage and making both immediate and long-range plans predicated on the positive aspects of giftedness.

Educational counseling. — Educational counseling of underachievers with superior ability takes on special significance at the secondary level in view of the vital choices and decisions which must be made during these years. In many schools, students must make a commitment while they are in the eighth grade to a high school course of study which will determine the content of both their immediate and long-range educational programs. At this time students must choose a special curriculum such as college preparatory, commercial, general, vocational, agricultural, or a related combination. Where this is true, the counselor has the dual responsibility of helping the school system understand the impact of such an early commitment on students, meanwhile helping the students to make the wisest choices available at that moment. In all this, the effective counselor works with and through the faculty and not alone.

To the academically talented underachiever this point of critical choice assumes even more meaningful proportions. If the pattern of disparity between potential ability and actual output has not been corrected in the junior high school years, he perhaps will underaspire in his choice of curriculum. Having failed to achieve in the elementary years and continued to underachieve in the junior high school years, a chronic underachiever would tend to select the course with the least academic demands. It takes both perceptive and sensitive guidance to help such a student realistically appraise himself and his future. However, if the talent in this student is to develop fully, every effort should be made to help him see as many kinds of opportunities as possible. In many instances these opportunities will include higher education. In other instances a vocational pattern requiring high ability but less academic work probably will be chosen. It is vital that these talented students obtain the appropriate educational content—and the recommended academic units—at the time prescribed.

During the process of educational counseling the school counselor should help the student build an academic program which will assist him in completing as many units as possible in the academic areas, including English, social studies, foreign languages, science, and mathematics. Wherever acceptable to the student, the counselee should be scheduled for advanced or honors groups or additional courses in those subjects in which he has special talents. In those subjects in which the student is having some academic problems he should be referred for special assistance to an outside tutor, to a school psychologist for a psychological workup if this is indicated, and to a remedial reading specialist if there is a special problem of this type.

The high school years from grades 9 through 12 hold particular significance for all students with ambitions for higher education, since every subject taken during those 4 years is indicated on the transcript forwarded to the colleges. As pointed out throughout this bulletin and in *Guidance for the Academically Talented Student* (Drews, 1961), it is critically important that the school counselor obtain a thorough and qualitative evaluation of each underachiever—his giftedness, his underachievement, his personal-social dynamics, and his family background.

For the usual type of gifted underachiever—the one who tests extremely high on all kinds of measures, but whose daily work results in a low scholastic average—it seems evident that the difficulty is with academic conformity and performance, rather than lack of basic skill or actual acquisition of knowledge. But any counselor familiar with the kinds of items which appear on the scholastic aptitude tests realizes that the questions are academically oriented. A gifted student would not be able to respond accurately without considerable learning and development. The difficulty seems to reside in the underachiever's attitudes toward actual daily attainment, his lack of pride in doing a job well, and his inability to postpone immediate satisfactions for more long-range goals. Again, working with and through the faculty, as well as directly with the student, the counselor needs to interpret and treat these attitudes as crucial to later academic and professional success, in which each new attainment is built on solid, systematic understanding and knowledge previously attained.

Vocational counseling.—Vocational counseling of the underachiever of superior talent is a topic which has been practically neglected in the literature. Many authorities feel the vocational guidance of the gifted achievers has been somewhat submerged in the nationwide preoccupation with college placement of the gifted. Vocational objectives should not be neglected since the establishment of specific goals has been held, by at least one authority (Gowan, 1957), to be a positive force in giving direction for the underachiever, and may therefore help reduce the extent of underachievement.

Underachievers likewise have a tendency to underestimate, to underaspire, in their occupational aims. Systematic counseling at the secondary level should help the student develop suitable vocational goals. In this endeavor, guidance and counseling staffs must have inclusive, accurate, and pertinent occupational information. Though most gifted students will aspire toward professional, managerial, and semiprofessional occupations, many will choose to be skilled craftsmen and others will appropriately choose other fields which may not require higher education.

One effective role the counselor can play is to project an image of the underachiever as a productive, capable individual, trained and launched in the career toward which the underachiever may aspire. The fact that the counselor has faith in the underachiever, has full belief in the underachiever's capacity to acquire the skills and no misgivings about his talents, and will "see him through" and not "stop caring"—these are the special counseling needs of most underachieving students.

Personal adjustment counseling.—Another area which represents a significant and important function is the personal adjustment counseling of the gifted underachiever. In the most recent report on Terman's original group of gifted students (Terman and Owen, 1959), there appeared a thorough evaluation showing the general adjustment rating of the subjects in relation to the level of their education. The study shows that while the extent of maladjustment is less among the gifted group than among the general population, serious personal adjustment problems occur, even among those with superior ability. During the last year of high school, many gifted counselees feel the need to function more independently after graduation. Other adjustments involve: college investigation and placement; the break from home and familial ties; living among peers in a new situation; military commitments; interpersonal relationships of all types, including heterosexual development; and continuation of all the other aspects of maturation.

Some students will manifest much more skill and adeptness in coping with these problems than others. An early review of the literature on underachievement (Beasley, 1957) has shown that certain investigations support the presence of a positive correlation between poor personality integration and lowered academic output, while other investigations show that neurotic or seriously disturbed personalities tend to achieve. The author observes:

> One might conclude that the fact of adjustment, or lack of it, the presence of inferiority, or freedom from nervous symptoms, for example, has to be understood in its more personal, subtle and pervasive aspects than as the particular phenomena which in themselves account for underachievement. (Beasley, 1957.)

Depending on the amount of their training, competency, and experience, school counselors will frequently be able to assist gifted underachievers directly in working through individual personal adjustments. Some problems, of course, will require more attention and counseling service than others. To a large extent the nature of personal adjustment counseling will be determined by the kinds of problems the underachiever brings to the counselor for study and assistance.

School counselors must be alert to the personal needs of gifted underachievers, and in those cases where additional specialist help is indicated, a proper referral should be made. In the few situations where underachievers manifest deep-seated personality problems, counselors should probably recommend psychiatric therapy.

Seriously disturbed students are usually referred by the counselors to the school psychologists who may then arrange for psychiatric consultation. In some cases, school psychologists provide a complete psychological diagnosis. In school systems where the school psychologist is authorized to do this, he assumes the responsibility for initiating treatment. In other cases, the school psychologist works with the student on a preliminary basis and structures a referral to the psychiatrist or psychiatric clinic. Each school system has its own internal means of referral. Most experts agree that the earlier the referral is made, the better the hope of improvement. Many school specialists work feverishly to reduce the time involved from the referral date to the first psychiatric interview.

Referral Procedures

Implicit in all educational, vocational, and personal-social counseling services is the need for proper referral to specialists, where indicated. This applies not only to the school psychologists and consultant psychiatrists just described but to remedial reading and study skills specialists, speech therapists, school nurses and school physicians, school social workers, subject matter tutors, community social agencies, juvenile court authorities, college and university representatives, and resource people in various academic and clinical areas.

Because of the individualized and complex nature of each student's personal and educational problems, the school counselor must be thoroughly informed about the specific assistance available for each kind of difficulty. The nature of the counseling problem determines the kind of referral, if any, which the school counselor should arrange for the underachiever. Many underachievers will profit from a variety of approaches and combinations of speciality assistance.

College Placement Counseling for the Gifted Underachiever

An important specialized service which the school counselor provides to the underachiever is college admissions counseling. The underachiever with superior ability is a particularly difficult youngster to place in college, primarily because of his record of poor achievement. Since the single best predictor of success in college is rank in class (Wiliams and McQuarry, 1953), the school counselor finds it imperative to interpret the underachievement properly in each case. The problem here is not to select several colleges for a final choice but to find a college that is willing to take a chance on the applicant.

Perhaps the most effective way of placing underachievers in college is to continue service to them on an individualized, highly qualitative basis. The underachiever requires considerable professional attention and interpretation, and probably nowhere in the educational sequence is there a greater need for closer articulation, mutual understanding, and cohesive approaches than in the process of counseling for college placement. Many admissions officers recognize high school guidance and counseling personnel as fellow professionals who have considerable data to share. The building up of such materials in high schools and colleges throughout the country, in a kind of educational emulation of social service exchange, should be of considerable value in dealing with the overall problem.

While counselors will find such basic references as *College Ahead!* (Wilson and Bucher, 1958) and *How to Get into College* (Bowles, 1958) of some general aid for all college-bound students; and Daane's chapter on "College Information for Superior and Talented Students" in *Working With Superior Students* (Shertzer, 1960) of some more specific assistance, there is probably no authoritative treatment on how to place gifted underachievers in college.

However, this is a problem which is beginning to attract the attention of organizations such as the Association of College Admissions Counselors. In a recent article (Burnham, 1959) one specialist set up suggested criteria for properly assessing admission data. In this thorough treatment the author refers to five cases of gross underachievement, recognizing the limitation of psychometrics as adequate measures of noncognitive factors.

A different type of underachievement is exemplified by the gifted high school student who, for a variety of reasons, fails to go to college. One fairly extensive coverage of this kind of loss of talent is presented in *Encouraging Scientific Talent* (Cole, 1956), showing that geographic, financial, motivational, interest, intangible, and nonacademic factors affect college-going plans.

It would seem that the concerned professional guidance and counseling specialists at both the high school and college levels would profit from a mutual program of investigation and understanding. In addition, the resources should be utilized of organizations such as the American School Counselors Association, the American College Personnel Association, American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, Association of College Admissions Counselors, and the College Entrance Examination Board.

Research

One special function that guidance and counseling staffs should seriously consider in their services for gifted underachievers is research, including followup. The specialists charged with the helping roles should know intimately the research findings pertinent to underachievement and their implications for guidance and counseling services.

Specialists at the secondary level should be collecting and evaluating their own data with the idea of improving methods and contributions. Guidance and counseling staffs should be informed and knowledgeable about research projects and experimental programs at the high school level nor should they neglect the findings at the elementary, college, and graduate levels. In the interests of articulation, sequence, and cohesion, such an approach is imperative.

Schools which have the genuine desire to organize and operate a vigorous program for the gifted, and especially for the underachievers, should expand their research activities to enhance the value of their guidance services.

Staff Needed and Generally Available

Secondary schools in the United States have recently begun to assess the assignment of various educational personnel responsible for working with problems of underachievement.

It seems critically important for schools wishing to develop active programs for underachievers first to diagnose the kinds of underachievement, individually and qualitatively, and then assign staff accordingly. Because of the high incidence of underachievement in foreign languages, for example, the school counselor should work with an underachieving student and his foreign language teacher to determine whether the situation might be remedied by a change in grouping, schedule or program, adjustment of curricular content or approach, change in attitude or set, or a reconsideration of goals and values. Frequently such an underachiever is gifted and attaining at high levels in other subjects. The special knowledge and technique of the school counselor may often assist the student in becoming more productive.

Problems whose etiology and manifestation reflect home and familial difficulties may well involve the services of the guidance staff, school psychologist or school social worker, and related specialists. Some schools have consultant psychiatrists available, and the student may require such a referral. In attempting to improve a student's achievement by improving his mental hygiene, it is often important to employ a team approach—the school psychologist or clinical psychologist provides the original diagnostic workup, the social worker provides casework for the parents; and the psychiatrist assumes the therapeutic role with the student.

Underachievement which reflects deep-seated academic or learning difficulties may require the special study and contributions of the classroom teacher, the remedial reading expert, and the study skills authority. The counselor will of necessity be involved in this procedure, and his role might well be in the motivational counseling approach with the counselee. School systems will do well to explore resources in education and psychological departments in nearby colleges for consultation on learning disabilities.

Some underachievers have problems involving physical difficulties. Sensitive and perceptive guidance staffs will call on the school nurse and school physician for proper examinations, or request that the parents arrange for one.

Goldberg (1958) has pointed out that the correct evaluation of the underachiever and his problem may require the services of social agencies on a clinical, rather than an academic or guidance, level. Those schools which lack the services of qualified and competent school counselors or school psychologists might best turn to agencies with diagnostic or evaluative functions, as well as typical casework and counseling roles. That this procedure is presently somewhat alien to school organizations is seen in a recent survey (Stern, 1959) which shows that only 3 out of 37 schools involved social agencies, diagnostic or therapeutic, at any step. This probably reflects the schools' emphasis on presenting learning problems as basic to underachievement, some limitations in familiarity with the total problem, a desire to deal with the difficulty in the school community, and a reticence about making the indicated referral.

The trained school counselor or school psychologist, of course, is competent to make the referrals, and this certainly seems desirable in some cases of underachievement. Community agencies such as mental health clinics, community health centers, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, family service agencies, Catholic youth organizations, the Jewish Occupational Council, and B'nai B'rith, frequently have staff with the special skills required. Depending on the local status and function of such agencies, their intake policies, and their available personnel, they represent a rich resource for the school guidance staffs in dealing with underachievement at the secondary level.

Before contacting specialists outside of the school, the counselor must consider carefully the role of the parent in a child's achievement problem. The experienced school counselor would encourage conferences with both parents as soon as the proper identification and evaluation of this problem have been obtained. The degree of the parent's participation reflects the extent of their involvement in, and commitment to, the problem. The perceptive counselor can learn much about the attitudes and values of the parents, the power system within the home, the consistency of parental dealings with the student, the assumption of masculine and feminine roles, and the imposition of values on the child as these relate to his underachievement.

A classic reference on the importance of child-rearing procedures is Winterbottom's thesis (1953) dealing with mothers' stated expectations of mastery with their 8-to-10-year-old children's N-achievement scores. This type of information, whether transmitted by the previous elementary school, elicited from social case work data, or through questionnaires, surveys, or interviews is of critical value and import.

As indicated previously, group guidance and group counseling methods are frequently advocated as special techniques in working with gifted underachievers. These specialized approaches are typically under the supervision of the school guidance staff, who may conduct the group sessions or direct the efforts of specially selected teachers or other staff members. In the DeWitt Clinton experiments, for example (Goldberg, 1959), groups of underachievers were regularly scheduled for daily homeroom guidance sessions with special teachers.

In some secondary schools, school counselors and the school psychologist work as a team with groups of underachievers. One experimental study (Broedel. Ohlsen, Proff and Southard, 1960) on the effects of group counseling on gifted underachieving adolescents in the secondary schools involved the participation of counseling psychologists.

In all work with intellectually able students, including those who are underachieving, the counselor's effectiveness will be in proportion to his ability to develop an active partner relationship with the high school faculty. Teachers feel they have much to offer the prize students, and it is they who will see the resulting product. Underachievers present problems to these teachers but, once enlisted in an understanding attempt at meeting the special needs of these basically able students, the teachers will draw on resources of stimulation quite beyond any the counselor can otherwise command. Case conferences of all interested faculty members and counseling personnel will be especially helpful in this enterprise.

Secondary schools in today's society have the unique opportunity of assisting underachievers with superior ability toward heightened creativity, attainment, and personal fulfillment. Our knowledge of the nature of underachievement and of the procedures most effective in its prevention or cure is still in a relatively primitive state. It is certain, however, that like most other kinds of human behavior, underachieving behavior is amenable to change. The teamwork of teacher, administrator, guidance specialist, and parent will, with conscientious effort and experimentation, be able to effect the desired changes, to the benefit of the underachiever and society as a whole.

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CHAPTER V

What Can Be Done at the College Level

Robert O. Stripling

Introduction

Relatively little research has been reported on the nature or prevalence of the college underachiever with superior ability. From those studies which have been reported and from information given in chapter II in this bulletin, it is easy to conclude that underachievers with superior ability face problems which make it difficult for them to experience academic success in college. For example, they often display attitudes of hostility or hypercriticalness toward other people—attitudes, in most instances, not revealed by overt behavior, but rather in more subtle ways. (Shaw and Brown, 1957.) Also, they have a tendency to be socially insensitive and self-centered. Consequently, they may be less aware of social responsibility than their more successful colleagues. (Morgan, 1952).

College underachievers with superior ability may or may not be able to read as well as the achieving student with a similar academic aptitude. Likewise, the range of health problems for both groups is about the same. (Wedemeyer, 1953.)

Shaw and Brown's study indicates that a college underachiever with superior ability is likely to come from a rural setting. They found that 47 percent of those whom they studied came from population areas of less than 2,000, while only 17 percent of the achievers with similar abilities came from such population areas. Conversely, 50 percent of the achievers with superior ability came from population areas of over 10,000, while only 25 percent of the underachievers came from such population areas.

Studies have indicated that most of those identified as gifted youth come from homes in the middle socioeconomic bracket. Significantly, economic factors may help determine the attitude of the college underachiever with superior ability. Wedemeyer (1953) found that most of the underachievers among the group he studied were working outside school, some as many as 30 hours. Shaw and Brown (1957) observed that there was a tendency among underachieving superior students to feel that they had not had the material things they would like from life. Shaw and Brown also noted that underachievers also seemed to cary a lighter college load than achieving students with similar intellectual capacities. This may be related to the fact that the underachieving students are often required to work to support themselves while in college.

Morgan (1952) noted a significant difference in interest patterns between the two groups as measured on the Strong Vocational Interest Blank. Only 11 percent of the nonachievers he studied had a primary or secondary pattern in Group V (social-service occupation), while 40 percent of his achievers with superior ability had such patterns. This further substantiates Shaw and Brown's observation, previously mentioned, that the underachiever with superior ability has less social sensitivity than his counterpart, the college achiever with similar intellectual ability.

Shaw and Brown (1957) reported that there is a tendency for underachievers to take fewer recommended academic subjects in high school than achievers. However, they noted that the underachievers with superior ability compared favorably with achieving college students of similar ability as shown on standardized achievement tests. With respect to this finding, Shaw and Brown observed that the underachieving students must have absorbed as much general information from their schooling, or elsewhere, as had their achieving intellectual peers.

Wedemeyer (1953) noticed that, as a group, the college underachievers with superior ability had not distinguished themselves in the area of leadership. This suggests a general pattern of underachievement which extends beyond the inability of these students to obtain college grades commensurate with their high intellectual ability.

Studies and clinical observations indicate that the origin of the problems of the college underachiever with superior ability is not in the college environment. Failure to adjust to college is not the answer. Most of these students have a record of underachievement dating back to high school or even elementary school. The origin of the problem seems to be in the underachiever's home and social setting. (Strunk, 1960.) Gowan (1955) reported that clinical observations by Robert suggest that underachievers with superior ability may actually like school—the stimulation of the intellectual environment—but that the problems they bring with them to the school setting prevent them from achieving at the level expected of students with their intellectual capacity. Some of these problems stem from disagreement between parents, transference of problems from the parents to the child, overanxiety or overprotectiveness on the part of parents, broken homes, and similar problems resulting in conflicts in the home environment.

When we take into consideration the findings of Shaw and Brown that the college underachiever with superior ability may do as well on standardized achievement tests as the college achiever with superior ability, we realize that the college underachiever may be learning as much but is unable or unwilling to conform on college examinations and other assignments and fails to earn grades commensurate with his measured ability or knowledge. This raises a serious question as to whether the underachiever is at fault or the college's traditional method of measuring progress is inadequate. Perhaps the problem is a mixture of both. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the college to study carefully the total problem, both from the point of view of the student and the college's total program.

The extent to which colleges and universities work with underachievers with superior ability to help them overcome their problem varies considerably over the United States. It is not uncommon for up to 45 percent of a class to leave by the end of the freshman year and another 10 percent by the end of the sophomore year. A number of studies have shown that among those dropping out because of failing grades are many underachievers with superior ability. Also, it has been estimated that between 20 and 35 percent of college students with superior ability can be classified as underachievers. Since these students can be identified before they enter college (Passow, 1957) and since they are accepted, colleges have an obligation to make every effort possible to help them overcome their pattern of underachieving. In these critical times it is imperative that the intellectual capacity of our society be developed to the maximum.

The problem of the underachiever with superior ability is one that involves every aspect of campus life. If the institution is to assist him, there must be a dedicated interest on the part of both the administration and the faculty in helping to solve the personal and social problems that prevent him from achieving commensurate with his intellectual capacity. The day has passed when our society can afford the luxury of professors interested only in the "intellectual" aspect of the students. This is in no way to be interpreted as an attempt to belittle the researcher whose primary interest relates to intellectual development and who may have a lesser interest in assisting young people in the area of personal and social development. The need is for adding to such intellectual stimulation assistance in other aspects of student life. The importance of challenging the underachiever with superior ability by high academic standards cannot be overly stressed; however, this is not enough to make him succeed. He must be guided by those who have a sympathetic and helpful attitude toward the problems he faces which have caused his underachievement.

Also, institutions of higher learning must be more sensitive to the kinds of underachievers among their students. Not only is there a need to identify and help the chronic underachiever with superior ability, but renewed efforts must be made to identify the situational and the hidden underachiever (described in chapter II) and provide them with the help and guidance they need.

The attitude of student leaders toward the college environment and their responsibility for helping to create a climate of intellectual curiosity and development is important. The effect that the college student leader can have on stimulating the development of the entire student body, including the underachiever, cannot be overestimated. Perhaps this is one of the great challenges facing college student leaders today. College staff members should be sensitive to opportunities to present this problem to these student leaders. This can be done through the channels of communication between students and faculty developed through well-organized programs of guidance.

College Guidance Programs for the Underachiever With Superior Ability

One of the ways in which colleges and universities can assist underachievers with superior ability is through the development of strong guidance and student personnel programs. Such programs are widely recognized today as integral parts of higher education. Not only does an institution have the responsibility for providing an intellectual environment in which a student can learn but also the services through which he can be assisted in better understanding himself and his goals, and in taking the necessary steps toward the fulfillment of these. For the superior student who is underachieving these services are indispensable if he is to have an opportunity to develop his intellectual capacity fully. No institution should admit such a student to its program unless it is prepared to assist him in adjusting so that he can function efficiently and successfully in the academic environment. Some of the more important guidance services, particularly as they relate to the underachiever with superior ability, will be discussed here.

Selective Admissions

Although the underachiever with superior ability, particularly the chronic underachiever, is identifiable, there is no one specific criterion by which he can be identified. Most often he can be discovered through the examination of a combination of criteria such as scores on standardized tests (intelligence, achievement, personality, and interest) taken in high school for college admissions, school grades, teachers' ratings, and other information found on cumulative records. (Passow, 1957.) Once the underachiever with superior ability is identified, through admission data, the institution must ask these questions: Does our program fit this student, and are we able to give him the special help he needs? If not, are we both able and willing to adjust our program to meet his needs? If these questions can be answered in the affirmative, the institution, by admitting the underachiever, can make a real contribution to his development. This is not to suggest that an institution should refuse admission to such a student, but rather that it feel challenged to assist him in solving those of his problems relating to academic achievement. It is only when this responsibility is assumed that it can be said that an institution is helping to meet one of the great needs of our times—the maximum development of all intellectual capacity in our society.

Another question to ask when considering a student for admission is: Are the student's academic interests and vocational goals compatible with the program of the institution? One student in a mideastern college who had a history of underachievement starting in elementary school and who was receiving poor grades in college made the following statement at the end of his freshman year:

> I hadn't made very good grades in high school; however I thought that it would all change when I got to college since I had made up my mind what I wanted to do. I wanted to become a biologist. I stated this major interest clearly on my admissions blank. Consequently, when I arrived on campus and started my classes, I was amazed to discover that the college had a biology laboratory less well equipped than my high school and the two instructors were not as good as my high school biology teacher even though both of them had a doctor's degree.

Although it is realized that the vocational objectives of a college youth may change, the institution should be certain that its program fits the stated vocational objectives of a prospective student. This is particularly important in the case of the underachiever with superior ability who has enough problems to cope with without being faced with an unchallenging college program.

An Academic Advisement Program

As indicated above, the attitude of the administration and faculty toward the problems of the underachiever with superior ability is most important. Research indicates that a major problem facing the underachiever is that of relating to other people. It is important then for him to experience a satisfying personal relationship with some staff member, who not only shows an interest in him as an individual but also challenges him to superior academic attainment compatible with his ability. For this reason, it is necessary for the administration to take the leadership in encouraging the development of a strong student advisement program. This can be done in many ways, including the allocation of faculty time and the recognition of success in this area through promotions and salary increases. With a reasonable ratio of advisees to adviser, it is possible for a staff member to be responsible for the academic advisement of students with a range of problems and abilities, including underachievers with superior ability.

The goals of the academic advisement program should be to assist the underachiever with superior ability in:

a. Developing realistic vocational goals. This can be accomplished by helping him project his own life image onto the world of work and helping him gain satisfactions from "seeing" himself in a future vocational role compatible with his ability and interest

b. Planning an academic program that leads him with maximum efficiency toward his projected life goals. This would include courses and activities which guide him toward marriage, parenthood, and civic responsibility, as well as vocational goals.

c. Securing the special counseling, testing, and other help that he may need to assist him in clarifying his goals. Such assistance is often necessary for the underachiever with superior ability. The faculty adviser in most cases will not have the skills or time needed to give this help; however, he should be sufficiently sensitive to detect a student's need for counseling and also be familiar with the steps that should be taken to help the student get assistance.

Through data supplied at the time the student is assigned, the faculty adviser should be able to identify immediately the chronic underachiever with superior ability. Of course, the situational or hidden underachiever, described in chapter II, presents a more difficult problem of identification. However, through a periodic check of grades and regularly scheduled conferences, the faculty adviser should be able to discover the situational underachiever. Once such a student is identified, it is the responsibility of the adviser to give him the help he needs or assist him in getting help to cope with the problem causing his temperorary drop in academic achievement. Such problems, if not resolved, can lead to more severe problems and eventually to chronic underachievement. For this reason, it is most important that the adviser be sensitive to the needs of such a student.

Although we have very little information about the hidden underachiever with superior ability, the faculty adviser may be in the best position to identify him. Often the sensitive adviser with insight can detect "hidden" abilities through informal contacts. This is particularly true if his attention has been focused on the problem and he is aware of the kinds of behavior patterns that may be exhibited by such students.

If the college faculty members are not sufficiently prepared or orientated to carry out the responsibilities of advisement as outlined above, such preparation should be provided through inservice education.

A Counseling Center

As indicated above, not all of the problems of the college underachiever with superior ability can be solved through a faculty advisement program. There often is a need for both psychological and physical diagnosis, counseling, and therapy that goes beyond the range of the ability or time of the faculty adviser. In most cases the underachiever needs the services of a competently staffed counseling center. Such a center should be independent of any department on the campus and should be established as a campuswide service to both students and faculty. The staff should include such specialists as counseling psychologists, clinical psychologists, marriage and family counselors, psychiatric social workers, speech and hearing therapists, reading clinicians, and psychiatrists. Naturally, it is important to realize that each member of such a staff should be professionally prepared and orientated as evidenced by background and experience, membership and participation in professional groups, research, and writing.

The primary services of the counseling center should be those of (1) counseling with individual students, (2) inservice education for faculty advisers, (3) consulting with individual faculty members involved in student advisement, (4) counseling with faculty members, and (5) research related to the campus community and student body. Such services are needed by all students. However, the need is emphasized by the problems presented by the underachiever with superior ability.

Counseling and other therapeutic services can be of little help to a person unless he wants such help and is willing to give the time and energy required to profit from this help. Assuming that the underachiever with superior ability wants help, the counseling center can be of assistance in the following specific ways:

Assist in clarifying his problem.—In most cases it is not an easy task for the underachiever with superior ability to clarify his problem since, as stated previously, the academic problems he faces are likely to be related to his total pattern of adjustment. Also it is not only important that he understand his problem, but he must be assisted in gaining a better understanding of his own strengths and weaknesses. It is only through such an understanding of himself that he will be able to work in an effective way toward the solution of his problem of underachieving. The assistance of the counseling center may involve, in addition to counseling, a comprehensive psychological and physical diagnosis. The center should be able to provide such a diagnosis through its own staff, or be in a position to make the necessary referrals to other agencies, both on and off the campus.

Determine if it is practical for the student to continue school and at the same time get the help he needs to overcome the problem of underachieving.—It must be recognized that the underachiever with superior ability may have emotional problems so deep that it is not wise for the counseling center to attempt to work with him. This is based on the assumption that the college or university counseling center will not be a place where the emotional and other problems of *all* persons can be solved. Rather, it will be a campus agency to serve those students who can (1) fit into campus life, (2) continue to make at least a minimum academic progress, and (3) show promise of reaching a satisfactory level of adjustment without extended therapy. While it is recognized that the counseling center should not be in a position of making the decision as to whether or not a student continues in school, it is felt that such a center has the responsibility for supplying information that will assist the administration in reaching the best decision possible in the interest of both the student and the institution.

Plan a program of therapy.—Assuming that it is agreed that the underachiever with superior ability can profit from continuing with his studies and, at the same time get help with his problem, the counseling center, with the active cooperation of both the student and his faculty adviser, should take the initiative in planning a program of therapy. This might involve one or more of the following: personal counseling; the supplying of occupational and educational information; physical treatment; tutoring; help with study skills and habits; placement in special classes or programs; work in one or more remedial clinics on the campus, such as the reading clinic or the speech and hearing clinic; and group therapy involving a number of underachievers with superior ability.

Make periodic assessment of progress.—While it is recognized that progress with such a student may be slow, the counseling center, in close cooperation with the student's faculty adviser and his other instructors, should evaluate a student's progress at least once a semester. Only through such a systematic procedure can it be determined whether the student is receiving the kind of help he needs. To the extent that it seems wise, the student should actively participate in this evaluation. However, often a year or more can pass before progress in grades will be noted.

Health Services

As stated previously, the college underachiever with superior ability has about the same range and prevalence of health problems as the achieving student. However, because of his adjustment problem, he may be more concerned about his health. Possibly, he may have a psychosomatic condition or a physical disability impeding his academic achievement. For this reason, the staff of the student health service must be sympathetic, and professionally oriented to the problems of such a student, as well as aware of them. There should be a close working relationship between the student health services and the other parts of the institution's guidance program, especially the counseling center. A psychiatrist, with a background in both medicine and human behavior, is often in a good position to serve as a coordinating person between the counseling center and the college health service.

Residence Hall Program

The residence hall environment can play an important part in therapy for the chronic underachiever with superior ability. Residence hall counselors, through professional preparation and in-service education, can become sensitive to the problems faced by chronic underachievers and, under proper supervision, lead them toward more satisfying personal-social relationships. This can be accomplished through such activities as social and recreational programs, counseling, and group guidance. The residence hall counselor can also play an invaluable role in identifying the situational underachiever with superior ability and in helping him seek the assistance he needs. Through such important activities as individual conferences and group discussions, the competent counselor can also assist in the discovery of the hidden underachiever with superior ability.

To best serve the whole student community, the residence hall program must be an integral part of the institution's total program of guidance and personnel services.

Special Academic Programs

Nothing can be substituted for a strong academic program on a college campus. High academic standards maintained by a scholarly faculty skilled in teaching are indispensable if an institution of higher learning is to make its maximum contribution. However, the underachiever with superior ability needs special help with his personal problems in order to be able to take advantage of such academic opportunities. For this reason, special programs are often needed. The nature of such programs will depend on several factors, among which are the quality of the staff, the ratio of staff to students, and the special kinds of problems presented by underachievers in the student body. Examples of special programs that may prove helpful are mentioned below:

Orientation classes.—A number of institutions of higher learning have special orientation classes for entering students. These classes are designed to assist in exploring such important topics as (1) the purpose of college and what the particular institution has to offer, (2) adjustment to college life, (3) interpersonal relationships, (4) study skills, (5) psychology of occupational choice, (6) choosing a career, (7) developing life's goals, and (8) planning educational programs.

Generally, there is little attempt to place students in sections of such classes on the basis of ability or achievement. In the case of the underachiever with superior ability, however, there may be some justification for selective placement with carefully selected instructors. In this way, these students have the opportunity, under careful guidance, to discuss common problems related to underachievement.

Remedial classes.—While in many cases the underachiever with superior ability may have general knowledge in a subject field equal to the achieving superior student, he may not have the specific skills needed to progress as well in a class situation. This is especially true in areas of knowledge such as the natural sciences and mathematics. Also, these students often lack the study skills and reading ability needed to achieve high grades. For these reasons, institutions of higher learning should diagnose carefully the special problems faced bv each underachiever with superior ability in order to place him in the class or classes best designed to give him the help he needs. The importance of competently prepared staff for such classes cannot be overemphasized. Not only must they be well-prepared in their respective subject fields, but they must have the special skills needed for remedial teaching. Too, they need to have a strong background in human behavior and personality development.

Special classes for the intellectually superior student.—The underachiever with superior ability, like the achiever with superior ability, needs to be challenged by high academic standards. If the underachiever is ready to move forward in certain areas of learning, nothing can be more deadening or discouraging than a class progressing at a level below his ability and interest. For this reason, every effort should be made to identify those areas in which the underachiever is ready to progress rapidly so as to place him in suitable classes. Thus, it is conceivable that an underachiever with superior ability may be in honor classes in some areas of learning and in remedial classes in others. Such placement should be made only after a careful assessment of the student's strength and weakness, as well as his own feelings about his placement.

Honors programs.—A number of colleges and universities in the United States have honors programs (Angell, 1960; Jones, 1954; Landman, 1958; McConnell, 1935). Some of these programs were begun in the early part of the century, but most of them have developed since World War II, particularly during the last 5 years. However, there is little evidence in the literature to indicate that these programs have been open to the underachiever with superior ability. This is understandable since such programs are designed to attract the student who is superior in both intellectual capacity (as evidenced by scores on standardized tests) and achievement as indicated by grades. This may be wise since the chronic underachiever with superior ability would probably find an honors program difficult, especially if he were placed in it without proper guidance. However, it is suggested that in some cases he might be placed in an honors program during the time that he is getting therapy. The challenge of such a program could be therapeutic, since it has been pointed out earlier that, based on standardized test scores, the range of knowledge possessed by the underachiever with superior ability compares favorably with that of the superior student who is making high grades. Perhaps carefully controlled experiments are needed on the factors involved in placing underachievers with superior ability in honors programs.

Research and Program Experimentation on the Underachiever

As indicated above, little is known about the nature or prevalence of the problems of the college underachiever with superior ability. Less still is known about specific ways in which such students can be helped so that they will achieve commensurate with their high intellectual abilities. Also, it is recognized that the problem will vary from campus to campus depending on the institution and its student body. For this reason, it is important that each institution of higher learning conduct research on the problem. Studies similar to those reported by Assum and Levy (1947), Iffert (1958), Krathwohl (1952), Mullens (1952), Pearlman (1952), and Owens and Johnson (1949), as well as those already cited in this chapter, will not only help us better understand the problem of academic underachievement among superior college students but also among college students in general.

Conclusion

It seems evident from the foregoing discussion that an institution of higher learning can best help the underachiever with superior ability through a well-developed program of guidance and personnel services. Such a program must be adequately staffed and well organized. It must also be closely coordinated with other important aspects of the institution's program, particularly the instructional. It is only in such a setting that the college underachiever with superior ability can get the kind of help he needs.

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CHAPTER VI

Summary and Implications

Leonard M. Miller

Purpose

The emphasis in this bulletin on guidance for the underachiever with superior ability reflects one of the major purposes of the National Defense Education Act of 1958: that every young person, from the day he first enters school, should have an opportunity to develop his capacities to the fullest. The importance of focusing attention in education upon the child who either cannot or will not work up to his capacity has been stressed. The reader is reminded repeatedly that this significant loss of talent affects not only national strength and character but also personal satisfaction and productivity throughout the individual's lifetime.

This bulletin was prepared to help the reader understand the causes of underachievement among students with superior ability and to explain what some schools and communities are doing about it. The bulletin is directed toward a wide readership and is not limited to the educational specialist concerned with acquiring professional techniques and competencies. However, there are frequent references to skills needed in counseling; instruments used in identification and treatment; and the areas in which research is needed. The conferees have confined their discussions of the underachiever with superior ability to the area of academic underachievement.

The conferees also wished to delineate the nature, problems, and incidence of underachievement at various grade levels, and to describe in some detail guidance programs and services for the underachiever at these levels. This was done to point out the similarities and differences in techniques and the range of services applicable at each level.

Nature and Scope

As special school programs for students with superior ability have become more common, a noticeable interest has developed in the academically able students who seem to be underachieving. If only one or two students were failing to achieve at the level of their ability, this would be a simple matter of individual counseling, but when 20 to 30 percent of our able students are falling into the category of underachievers, this becomes a guidance problem of community concern. Chapter I reports excellent examples of how schools in various types of communities have determined the nature and scope of the problem. The author emphasizes that a well-planned effort to develop adequate guidance and counseling services could increase considerably our reserve of talent.

Identification and Definition

To assure sound procedures in establishing a program of guidance services for underachievers, schools will need first to formulate a definition of the underachiever. The conferees decided for the purpose of this bulletin that the underachiever is a pupil with superior ability whose performance, as judged either by grades or achievement test scores, is significantly below his high measured or demonstrated aptitudes or potential for achievement. With this definition accepted, they established criteria to identify the underachiever with superior ability. The underachievers fall into a number of categories and subcategories, including the chronic and the situational underachiever and the student with hidden underachievement. The chronic group is further subdivided into (1) those adjudged low by grades but not by tests, and (2) those low by tests but not by grades.

Research indicates that underachievers have certain characteristics generally. They tend to be more negative in their attitudes toward themselves and in their evaluation of others than are achievers. They show a higher degree of hostility and have stronger feelings of inferiority. They demonstrate behavior considered to be less mature than that shown by their achieving peers. In most schools underachieving boys outnumber underachieving girls, 2 to 1.

The Creativity Factor in Underachievement

The importance of conducting continued research with regard to the quantity and quality of creative processes in underachievers is stressed by the writers. Meanwhile, there are some guidance principles and attitudes applicable to highly creative youngsters which teachers and guidance workers can observe.

Stein (1956) believes that teachers and guidance workers should help the highly creative child maintain his assertiveness without being hostile and aggressive. Torrance (1960) contends that guidance workers should be concerned with the identification and development of creative thinking. He further points out that guidance workers can help the highly creative child cultivate those personality characteristics which are essential to his creativity and which are needed to help him avoid or withstand the censure of his peers.

Further studies are merited on the nature of creative talent among underachieving children. Such studies will contribute to a better understanding of this problem and will help define the role of teachers and guidance workers in handling it.

What Can Be Done at the Various Grade Levels

At the elementary level.—The problem of underachievement at the secondary and college level may have its roots in failure to provide effective educational experiences and services for children at the elementary level. There is evidence that academic underachievement is present in the earliest school years and that it is a fairly consistent characteristic of the pupil throughout his school career.

Any attempt to reduce the problem of underachievement must be based upon an acceptance of the broad implications of individual differences. For example, school personnel must recognize that there are readiness levels for all types of learning, with wide differences demonstrated in each individual as well as between individuals. The school staff must also know the factors, both of school and out-of-school origin, which contribute to underachievement. Guidance services at the elementary level are needed to help the child, parents, and members of the school staff make early and continuous identification of those factors.

The elementary school which is organized to detect underachievement at its earliest stages can bring to bear all of its resources in an effort to correct the condition before it becomes chronic. To accomplish this, the school should provide stimulating and challenging learning situations for each individual child through flexible grouping, utilize readiness factors, and recognize the importance of teacher-child relationships.

The elementary school teacher who works with the underachiever and recognizes the child's personal needs will attempt to provide a classroom atmosphere which will give the child a feeling of acceptance and a sense of security. Child study as an essential guidance function in the elementary school helps teachers provide meaningful learning experiences for all children. The parent-teacher conference is also an intrinsic part of the child-study program. Through child study, parent conferences, individual counseling, and group guidance procedures, the teachers [illegible] also assist the pupil in making personal adjustments.

To provide adequate counseling services at the elementary school level, a school counselor is needed to serve as a consultant to teachers and to work with pupils who cannot relate to the teacher and those whose problems are beyond the ability of the teacher to solve. School counselors work with teachers and parents to help them understand the needs of children and redirect pressures which may hinder achievement. They also utilize the help of other pupil personnel workers, such as the physician, nurse, school psychologist, psychiatrist, school social worker, and specialists in reading and study habits. Frequently, they must call upon other resources in the community such as family welfare, children's aid, and community health services.

At the secondary level.—Some students will show serious underachievement for the first time at the junior or senior high school level. Their academic difficulties may first be evident in specialized subject matter areas which are new to them. They may be rebelling because they do not wish to conform to teacher standards in the form of daily assignments.

There are other factors causing underachievement which may differentiate students at the secondary level from those at the elementary level. Some underachievers may have moved into the community recently and have no roots there. They may have personal problems which reflect certain basic psychological, physiological, or sociological influences. Making educational and occupational choices may be the problem. The attitude of parents and friends toward the value of education may present another problem. If education is not valued by the time pupils enter high school, they often underachieve.

An inclusive program of guidance services for the underachiever with superior ability at the secondary level involves much the same classification of personnel workers and techniques as those utilized at the elementary level, but the extent and nature of services rendered by some of these workers may be different.

The secondary school teacher's role cannot be overemphasized. His involvement in the identification and motivation of the underachiever through case study, group techniques, and parent conferences needs to be much the same as that of the elementary school teacher. He plays a most important role in making curricular adjustment and placements for the underachiever.

The counselor's role for secondary school students, however, differs in several areas from the duties performed by the counselor at the elementary level. Educational counseling, for example, takes on special significance, especially in the face of repeated failures in subjects in which tests indicate that the student should achieve readily. Counseling for and toward college attendance becomes an important function. A significant emphasis in counseling with underachievers at the secondary level is toward helping them make suitable vocational choices. To do this the counselor should be fully aware of a tendency for the underachiever to underestimate and underaspire in his occupational aims.

Another important counseling function at the secondary level is concerned with the underachiever's personal adjustment problems. His needs are centered in such areas as interpersonal relationships, changing maturation conditions, and adjustment to new living conditions.

At the college level.—Guidance for the college underachiever with superior ability poses a number of needs and problems which differ considerably in nature and degree from those of underachievers at the elementary and secondary levels.

Studies have revealed some interesting characteristics of the underachiever at the college level. One study (Shaw and Brown, 1957) indicates that many college underachievers with superior ability come from rural settings. Another study (Wedemeyer, 1953) reveals that most of the underachievers among the group studied were working outside of school, some as many as 30 hours a week. Several studies point up the fact that the college underachiever has less social sensitivity than his counterpart. Another study (Gowan, 1960a) revealed that, as a group, the college underachievers with superior ability had not distinguished themselves in the area of leadership. A most significant observation is that the origin of the problem of the college underachiever with superior ability is not usually in the college environment but rather in the home and the social setting in which he has lived.

The admissions office should be the first to identify this underachiever and should decide whether the college program fits his needs and, if not, whether the college is able and willing to adjust its program to meet them. The faculty advisor becomes a key person in assisting in the early identification of underachievers and in making proper referrals on the campus to the counseling center. The staff at the center should include such specialists as counseling psychologists, clinical psychologists, marriage and family counselors, psychiatric social workers, speech and hearing therapists, reading clinicians, and psychiatrists.

The program developed to help the student adjust to college should involve the following services: personal counseling, supplying occupational and educational information, physical treatment, tutoring, help with study skills and habits, placement in special classes or programs, work in one or more remedial clinics on the campus, such as the reading clinic or the speech and hearing clinic, and group therapy involving a number of underachievers with superior ability. In addition, the staff of the student health services may play an important role in assisting the student to cope with his problems. The residence hall counselor can assist the underachiever develop satisfying personal-social relationships as well as higher aspirations.

Services and staff for the underachiever at the college level, it will be noticed, do differ considerably in variety and nature from those at the elementary and secondary school levels.

Implications

The material presented in this bulletin is directed toward the establishment and improvement of guidance services for the underachiever with superior ability. In order to implement these findings and provide an adequate program of guidance services there must be some assurance that the responsibilities and roles of leaders in education and guidance at the national, state, and local levels are fully understood. For this reason the conferees who planned the bulletin feel that it is important to identify and emphasize some of the implications of roles which should be assumed by professional personnel in order to make a program effective.

The Team Approach

All staff members have a responsibility for recognizing and dealing effectively with underachievement, because so many persons have distinctive and vital roles to play that staff cooperation is vital. The staff concerned includes the school administrator, teacher, counselor, parent, psychologist, psychiatrist, school social worker, health specialist, study and remedial reading specialist, public and private employment personnel, and representatives of youth-serving agencies in the community.

All of these persons are needed for all children regardless of the size, location, or economic status of the school. Since these specialists may not be available in every local school, their services frequently can be provided through a county or other geographical area staffing plan.

Organizing the Guidance Program for Underachievers

Generally the program for the underachievers starts with the establishment of a guidance program for the academically talented student (Drews, 1961). When it has been decided that a guidance program is needed, the next step is to define the criteria for selecting staff personnel as an integral part of the total guidance program in the schools. In addition to thorough professional preparation, the criteria should include interest in working with underachievers, demonstrated ability to inspire students, willingness to supplement the regular group work with individual attention to students, ability to work as a member of a team, and patience.

In any plan of staffing, due consideration must be given to the scheduling of individual and group conferences, both during and after school hours. Planning must also include adequate physical facilities for individual counseling and testing and for meeting with groups (Twiford, 1960). The guidance office in an elementary school should be equipped differently from the guidance office in the secondary school or college. There should be toys, art materials, furnished doll houses, and the like which will provide an opportunity for the child to play and talk as the counselor works with him. In the secondary school and college there should be literature about educational and vocational opportunities.

To assure adequate time for counseling, careful attention should be given to the numerical ratio of guidance personnel to pupils. The recommended ratio is as follows: for public school counselors at the elementary level, 1 school counselor to each 600 pupils, and at the secondary level, 1 counselor to each 300 pupils. For school psychologists and school social workers, the current feasible ratio is 1 school psychologist and 1 school social worker to each 1,500 to 2,000 pupils.

Leadership Role

There are a number of reports which describe the leadership role assumed by school and community personnel in initiating programs for underachieving students with superior ability. These cover the purposes of a project, its activities, the personnel involved, results, evaluation, and recommendations. Examples of these programs follow:

The State of California reports on projects (McCreary, 1960) for identifying talent and encouraging its development in students in more than 200 school districts and county offices of education. The report briefly summarizes each program. Many of the schools involved have prepared separate detailed progress reports.

An example of one of these is a report of the High Schools of

Orange County, California (Beals, Black, and Simmons, 1960), in which the guidance needs for a selected group of high academic potential students were studied. The purpose of the study was to determine if the guidance needs of these students differ in quality and quantity from those of all other students. An additional purpose was to discover whether different guidance services were needed to aid these young people to achieve at the level of which they are capable or whether they perform at their expected level with the present services. The study was intended to determine how well these students adapted themselves to curriculum demands and availed themselves of the opportunities for leadership and activity participation. In addition a study was conducted of the kind of planning that these students were doing and the extent to which they were being helped in their plans by parents, teachers, counselors, and others. About 30 percent of the 247 students studied were making less than a "B" average, although they were capable of making higher grades.

Other examples of leadership roles are found in reports from schools participating in the Talent Preservation Project (New York City Board of Education, 1959) in the New York City Schools. A few of these are identified by school.

> In *School A*, a special grade advising position has been created for counseling underachievers with superior ability.
>
> In *School C*, leaders of the tutoring, motivational, and study skills groups volunteered their time to interview parents of the students in their groups. This additional communication encouraged parent interest and cooperation and became a factor in easing tensions.
>
> In *School G*, intensive interviewing of all underachievers is being conducted by the administrative assistant and the guidance counselor. Evening meetings were planned to inform parents of the school's efforts to stimulate and motivate gifted students.
>
> In *School K*, tutoring has proved to be so popular that students not included in the study have requested this help. A program of early identification, interviewing, and preprogramming of underachievers with superior ability was instituted.
>
> In *School M*, teacher sponsors have been assigned to accommodate the students' requests for more attention, information, and advice. Reorganization of the guidance program is providing for more intensive counseling of gifted achievers as well as underachievers.

Examples of other programs which define leadership roles will be found in Hopkins (1960), Kough (1960), McCreary (1960). Other leadership roles of specialists are included under diagnostic and treatment roles.

Identification and Diagnostic Role

It is suggested in chapter II that the most efficient way to initiate a program aimed at identifying bright underachievers is to begin with intelligence and aptitude test data. The staff person best qualified to secure this data is the school psychologist or counselor. When this information is made available to the teacher he may be the first person to identify the pupil who appears to be underachieving. However, the degree and nature of underachievement and determination of the causes may require the assistance of several specialists.

The identification of the casual underachiever can frequently be made by the teacher, counselor, or psychologist by comparing test scores and subject matter grades. But to solve the problem of the chronic or situational underachiever, the diagnostic process becomes much more involved and frequently requires the services of specialists such as the counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist, and school social worker. When case studies and clinical procedures are used, the subject matter specialist, remedial teacher, health workers, parents, and others must frequently be consulted.

Identification of the student with hidden underachievement is most difficult of all. Here the teacher whose keen observation detects occasional flashes of achievement by a student who has been especially motivated is a key member of the group.

Remedial Roles

When a preliminary diagnosis has been completed and recommendations made, the two persons who must work closely together in carrying out the recommendations within the school are the teacher and the counselor. The parents should, of course, be consulted for suggestions in developing a remedial or corrective program.

In the remedial role, one of the key decisions concerns the nature of the instruction which will be most helpful. Shall it be remedial instruction, or tutoring by a subject matter specialist, or both? What kind of class grouping will be most beneficial? Is acceleration or enrichment the most desirable approach? If remedial instruction is needed, in which subject areas should it be given? Who is best qualified to provide it and how and when should it be scheduled?

Some pupils will need intensive counseling services. These services may include a combination of individual and group experiences in problem solving. A primary objective would be to make certain the student has a good understanding of his potential and that goals are being developed with alternatives which will allow for revised choices if necessary.

Students with severe problems may need special therapy. They will generally be under the care and supervision of a psychiatrist or psychologist, and may require intensive treatment. This type of clinical service would be restricted to a very few and would likely involve a number of specialists.

Treatment for the bulk of underachievers would be handled by classroom procedures and through curricular adjustments, remedial instruction, and counseling. Counseling, however, would not be restricted to that provided by counselors. It might be done by the teacher, the psychologist, psychiatrist, or social worker. Since parental cooperation and understanding are essential for effective treatment, the school social worker, teacher, or counselor must work closely with the parent in the remedial process.

Followup Role

In order to determine the effectiveness of a guidance program for underachievers every school will need a followup plan to see whether progress is made, what readjustments might be necessary, and to determine whether underachieving behavior continues or recurs after the pupil leaves school.

Treatment procedures and practices must be continuously appraised by teachers, specialists, and parents as to the relative values and effectiveness, for example, of grouping practices, whether acceleration or enrichment or both should be used, and what therapeutic procedures proved to be most effective. It will be important to determine whether any of these specialized services should be provided for children earlier in their school programs. The adequacy of the services must also be evaluated.

Many schools with guidance programs related to the needs of the underachiever have developed various types of evaluation and self-appraisal forms. Some use their findings for purposes of evaluation, for class and staff discussions, for observations of changes in behavior, for determining the adequacy of testing programs and record forms, for gathering samples of work performed, or for use in parent conferences and discussion groups. In connection with the Talent Preservation Project in the City of New York, a number of followup and evaluation forms have been prepared. These are duplicated in appendix D of the *Interim Report* (1959).

Competencies and Understandings Peculiar to the Problems of the Underachiever

The professional persons who are mentioned in this bulletin as essential members of the team should acquire certain special competencies and understandings relating to the problems of the underachiever. For example, each person on the team should know the nature and scope of the problems of underachievers and what is implied in the identification of underachievers as defined in chapters I and II. Those who counsel underachievers must know the dynamics of various pupil environments, including the relation between the educational and vocational status of parents and the goals of students. If the counselor is to assist the student he must help him understand these dynamics, his potentialities, and the environments in which these will develop freely. Since the bright underachievers are often characterized as lonely and sensitive, and sometimes battered by tensions and pressures beyond their control, these factors must also be understood. To do this requires that a counselor possess social and cultural knowledge and sensitivity to a high degree.

Understanding and competencies for the school administrator and teacher.—Examples of the understanding and competencies school administrators and teachers should have are illustrated in some guidelines which were prepared by the assistant superintendent of Districts 21 and 22, Bronx, N.Y. (Hopkins, 1960). These guidelines not only reflect what the administrator looks for in attitudes and activities to be performed by the teachers, but also indicate the role he may perform in checking the progress of the program.

In these districts, a set of guidelines was distributed to all new teachers who would have children of the upper quarter in their respective classes. Hopkins suggested that the teachers who decided to participate in this program should have a good understanding of the developmental growth patterns of the children of the grade they teach, should know their own grade work thoroughly and understand the overall program described in curriculum bulletins, and should see themselves as a catalyst with the learner as the active ingredient and not as the producer and director only.

If teachers have these types of understanding, they will not hold back the rate of learning; they will recognize readiness in all aspects of learning better and perhaps earlier; and they will not short-change fast learners in content, pacing, or in offering challenges.

The counselor.—Throughout this bulletin emphasis has been placed upon the importance of having a well coordinated program of guidance and counseling services from the elementary school through college, as well as in other educational programs beyond high school.

The counselor should first have a depth of understanding concerning the problems of underachievers in general. He should also have the competency needed to serve as a coordinator, working with other specialists in diagnosing the causes of underachievement in an individual student. The special competencies which the school counselor needs to work adequately with the underachiever would include the following:

1. He must know the services underachievers need. He should know the names of specialists within the school and community, such as remedial specialists, tutoring personnel, and clinicians, whose services can be made available to underachievers, their parents, and teachers. He also must be able to develop plans and programs for utilizing these services cooperatively with the school administration and the agency which employs the specialist.
2. He is often required to help the teacher confirm the identification of the underachiever. Thus, he must know about tests, self-rating forms and other tools and techniques which would help identify the underachiever and give clues to causes of underachievement. He must understand important factors which need to be considered in identifying causes. He must understand the limitations and values of intelligence tests for measuring adequately differentiated capacities. See Drews (1961), French (1959), Gowan (1960a), and Shertzer (1960).
3. He must know how to plan and provide counseling services for underachieving students. See Drews (1961), Broedel, Ohlsen, Proff, and Southard (1960), and Shertzer (1960).
4. He must be informed in policies of marking, promotion, discipline, and curriculum building. See Drews (1961), French (1959), and Shertzer (1960).
5. He must be competent in conducting inservice education programs for staff personnel, with special attention to helping teachers identify the underachievers and maintain wholesome pupil-teacher relationships and understanding. (Drews, 1961, and Shertzer, 1960.)
6. He must understand how to organize and conduct study groups for parents. See Drews (1961), Kough (1960), and Shertzer (1960).
7. He must be competent in planning or conducting research projects related to the underachiever. See Anderson (1961), Baymur and Patterson (1960), Fliegler and Bish (1959), French (1959), and *The Gifted Student*, (1960).

The counselor's competencies have been described in considerable detail because of the important coordinating role he must assume in a guidance and student personnel program. The counselor is the one person on the team who has a responsibility to all the students in such matters.

Special competencies needed by all pupil personnel workers who work with underachievers.—Since the functions of all these persons—the phychiatrist, school social worker and school psychologist—are interrelated and designed to create conditions which will assist every pupil to achieve at or near his maximum level of ability, they must all have a clear understanding of the factors which facilitate or hinder achievement. Angelino (1960) defines these factors under these five headings: cultural, socioeconomic, ethnic, racial, and individual. He states that a number of other factors are not yet wholly understood, for example, the attitudes and feelings of the family and community toward having gifted children. Angelino predicts that as we become more aware of the factors responsible for low achievement, the proper institutions—and their leaders in the school, the community, and the nation—will be able to provide the proper conditions for more effective achievement.

Some competencies will be needed at the elementary school level to a degree greater than at the secondary or college level. For example, the counselor at the elementary level will place much emphasis on the early identification of the underachiever. He will be greatly concerned that the cumulative record contain all the essential details needed to understand fully the pupil's background and potential. Motivational techniques used at the elementary level may differ from those suitable at the secondary or college level. Counseling with parents of elementary school children will involve an understanding of child growth and rearing problems different from that needed for working with parents of secondary school and college students. As in counseling generally, the counselor will devote relatively greater attention to the parent of an elementary school pupil, while giving greater attention to the secondary school or college student himself.

In writing about the characteristics of the counselor who works especially with students of high ability, Gowan (1960b) states that:

> . . . In addition to successful teaching experience and an absorbing interest in children, the counselor should have professional training, being well grounded in testing, statistics, education of the able, psychology, and interviewing techniques. The counselor, compared to the teacher of the gifted, should be even more permissive, intraceptive, nondirective, and nonauthoritarian and should be eminently capable of playing the adult figure model role for these bright charges. . . .
>
> . . . The counselor who does not provide the gifted student with some prognosis of the problems which he may face in the future is doing him no service. . . .
>
> While the counselor for the able has the major responsibility for their guidance he cannot be expected to function alone. He needs cooperation from the principal, staff members, and teachers. On the part of the teachers, this cooperation includes, besides consultation with counselors, the ability, skill, and presence of mind to make referrals promptly when able students are not performing properly.

Common core of training for all pupil personnel workers.—There is a common core of training which should be included in the preparation of all pupil personnel workers. This core should include psychological and sociological foundations, principles of learning, basic understanding of the dynamics of human growth and development and behavioral services, basic principles of counseling, and general understanding of the contributions of a variety of specialists available in the school and community agencies.

Implications for higher institutions preparing personnel workers.—It is important that each institution of higher learning which offers professional preparation for guidance personnel carefully evaluate the content of its course offerings to be sure that the areas of competencies and understandings pertaining to counseling the underachiever are being covered.

Research

Throughout this bulletin reference is made to types of research needed to discover more facts about the nature and causes of underachievement and what schools can do to provide adequate preventive and corrective services related to this problem.

There is much that is not known about the causes of underachievement and the effectiveness with which the schools, parents, and community agencies can discover and utilize the maximum potential of the youth of the nation.

Areas in which research needs to be expanded are:

1. The conditions in the home, school, and community which create an alien world for certain high ability students.
2. Ways to measure underachievement among subculture groups in combinations of ethnic groups in all geographic areas of the United States.
3. The process of physical maturation and its relation to academic achievement.
4. What happens to underachievers after they leave school. Do they continue to manifest their underachieving behavior in their vocational and community living or is academic underachievement a phenomenon associated only with schools?
5. The causes of underachievement in specific subject matter fields. An example of this type of research is the current *Study of Under-Achievement in Language Learning.* (Pimsleur, 1961.)
6. The quantity and quality of creative processes in underachievers.
7. Factors not of school origin which contribute to underachievement.

Examples of other research studies which are needed, have been completed, or are in process of completion may be found in Anderson (1961), *The Gifted Student* (1960), Fliegler and Bish (1959), French (1959), Goldberg (1958), and Office of Education (1961).

Conclusion

With the growing numbers of educators becoming concerned with the problem of providing guidance and counseling services to help students develop to their maximum potential, it is hoped that this bulletin will provide useful suggestions and resource material for guidance programs at all educational levels.

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